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AMERICAN CRITICAL ESSAYS

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AMERICAN CRITICAL ESSAYS

XIXTH AND XXTH CENTURIES

Edited with an Introduction

by

NORMAN FOERSTER

AUTHOR OF 'AMERICAN CRITICISM: A STUDY IN LITERARY THEORY FROM POE TO THE PRESENT' (1928), ETC.

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INTRODUCTION

In the year 1904, in the first volume of his long series of *Shelburne Essays*, Paul Elmer More chose for his motto Lowell's declaration that 'Before we can have an American literature, we must have an American criticism'. In the year 1927, in the *Revue de Paris*, Mr. More was already in a position to assert that a group of American critics was doing 'altogether the most original and aggressive work we can show to the world,—a work more noteworthy, I make bold to say, than anything of its kind now done in England and equal to anything produced in France'. And the following year, Van Wyck Brooks, a critic in another camp, maintained that 'the critical movement is undoubtedly the most significant movement in our literature during the last decade or so'. In proportion as the realistic movement in our creative literature deliquesces, the critical movement is attracting more and more writers and readers to the effort to achieve an 'intellectual situation' capable of sustaining a new creative movement. If a revision of the *Cambridge History of American Literature* were being planned to-day, it would certainly give an honorable place to a subject omitted from that useful work: American criticism.

The general reader need not concern himself with the critical writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, nor even with those essays of the early nineteenth century with which American criticism properly begins—the contributions of Bryant and of Richard Henry Dana to the *North American*

Review. The first critic of distinction was Poe, whose work belongs to the 1830's and 1840's. He was followed by Emerson, Lowell, and Whitman, who, along with Poe, are the critics of the romantic movement, and by Howells and Henry James, who are the critics of the rising realistic movement: all six of them familiar to the modern reader by virtue of their creative as well as critical writings. For this reason they do not require so large a representation in an anthology as their admirable qualities of insight and of statement justify. The fact is otherwise when we come to the present century, in which a divorce has occurred between criticism and creation, at all events between the best criticism and the most vital creation. For this reason the critics of the twentieth century require a more ample representation and some words of comment.

Though criticism is always the battle-ground of literature, the conflict of opinion has perhaps never been more bewildering than in contemporary America. Here the Battle of the Books still rages between the moderns, or skeptical intellectuals, and all sorts of ancients, whether Hellenists, Puritans, or Victorians. A minor struggle is still in progress between the romanticists and the realists. A new major struggle has arisen between the 'humanists' and the 'naturists' (i.e. the allied forces of the romanticists, realists, and naturalists). On yet another front has developed a sharp opposition between the scholars and the critics, the scientific investigators of literary history in the universities and the critics of literature (of whatever stripe). 'All these and more came flocking.' Yet in the dust of a conflict in which every man seems arrayed

against his neighbor, it is possible, after all, to discern certain groupings. All the critics may be divided, broadly, into those who concern themselves specially with the literary foreground and those who concern themselves specially with the background of ideas that must sustain literature. In the first group fall the *impressionists*, both those who continue the romantic tradition of wide sympathy and those who go farther (under the impetus of modern skepticism) and assert that criticism is itself merely creation. Though most criticism in recent decades has been impressionistic in one of these senses, America has produced neither a Walter Pater nor an Anatole France, in lieu of whom may be mentioned a teacher in Harvard College, Lewis E. Gates (see p. 186). Another school of critics specially concerned with the literary foreground are the *expressionists*, who are in some respects closely allied with the appreciative wing of the impressionistic school. According to their doctrine, the task of the critic is complete when he has repeated in himself the creative experience, the 'intuition' expressed by the work of art, and has shown whether this experience was expressed completely. They are the followers of Benedetto Croce, whose chief American disciple in the field of criticism is J. E. Spingarn, formerly professor of comparative literature in Columbia University (see p. 426).

Among the literary critics who concern themselves specially with the background of ideas, the materials from which authors consciously or unconsciously make a selection, again two fairly distinct schools emerge. One of these schools is that which might be named (following its chief initiator,

Randolph Bourne) the new *nationalists*. They are dealing with the problem which challenged Walt Whitman and a series of earlier critics and creative authors stretching back to the foundation of the American Republic, the problem of adjusting the course of the national letters to the conditions of the national culture, and they are confronting this problem with a new adroitness and circumspection. Mainly, they are observers, diagnosticians, subservient to the vital 'forces' that are actually present in American life and therefore—as they conceive—necessary. Their prophets are Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, to whom they look for the new synthesis, or integration of vision, of the twentieth century. Owing partly to the early death of Bourne, the leader of this group has been Van Wyck Brooks, whose best-known books are *America's Coming-of-Age* (1915), *Letters and Leadership* (1918), and *The Ordeal of Mark Twain* (1919). His leadership is now shared with Lewis Mumford, author of a thoughtful book on *The Golden Day: A Study in American Experience and Culture* (1926) and a finely written study of *Herman Melville* (1929). Advocate of 'the good life' and 'a complete culture', Mr. Mumford offers, however, scant assistance towards 'reformulating a more vital tissue of ideas and symbols to supplant...the abstract framework of ideas which we have used, in lieu of a full culture, these last few centuries'. Similarly, Mr. Brooks insists that criticism must provide 'a working-plan', a 'sort of programme' analogous to those of Carlyle, Ruskin, Mazzini, Taine, and Nietzsche (see p. 479), without, however, making clear what his own constructive scheme may be. The value of the nation-

alist group of critics, indeed, lies not in power of construction, nor in power of destruction, but rather in their earnest effort to perceive wherein American life and letters are inadequate and in their incitement to fresh ventures of the mind and spirit.

The other group of critics who are interested in ideas, and the only group that offers a constructive programme of ideas, are the *humanists*. They are continuing and intensifying the labor of Emerson and Lowell in America, and of Matthew Arnold in England, in the task of penetrating to the sound and permanent elements in the traditions of humanity, and they are asserting that any mode of progress must be illusory that refuses to take these elements into account. Specifically, it is their effort, as it was the premature effort of Arnold, to determine how much is durable in the two great traditions of the West, the Greek and the Christian; to which the leading humanists have added, indeed, the traditions of India and China. Their central evidence, however, lies not in history but in the data of human experience, which are as accessible to-day as in the past. In the light of present and recorded experience, they maintain, a complete culture necessitates a sharp contrast between what Emerson termed the law for man and the law for thing, the human realm of value and quality and the purely quantitative realm of nature. Among the humanists may be placed, with reservations, the late W. C. Brownell (see p. 235) and George Edward Woodberry (see p. 212). The true initiators and leaders of the group, however, are Irving Babbitt, professor of French literature in Harvard University and author of various books including

Rousseau and Romanticism (1919), and *Democracy and Leadership* (1924) (see p. 293), and Paul Elmer More, formerly editor of *The Independent*, *The New York Evening Post*, and *The Nation*, and author of many volumes of *Shelburne Essays* and a sequence of five books on the general subject of The Greek Tradition (see p. 343). For some years the most prominent critic writing under the influence of Babbitt and More was Stuart P. Sherman, professor of English in the University of Illinois and author of *Matthew Arnold* (1917) and *On Contemporary Literature* (1917) (see p. 451); in his later work he developed humanitarian rather than humanistic tendencies. Prosser Hall Frye, professor of English in the University of Nebraska, attained his humanistic point of view in the main independently, and collected a number of his essays in *Romance and Tragedy* (1922) (see p. 364) and *Visions and Chimeras* (1929). The ideas of these and other humanists as a group were for the first time formulated in the conclusion of *American Criticism* (1928) by Norman Foerster, who also edited a manifesto, *Humanism and America* (1930), containing essays by fourteen contributors. In England, the thought of Babbitt and More has been ably summarized by Philip S. Richards in three articles in *The Nineteenth Century and After* (April and May 1928, and April 1929). In France, Louis J. A. Mercier has recently published a book, reviewing the work of Brownell, Babbitt, and More, *Le Mouvement humaniste aux États-Unis* (Hachette, 1929).

NORMAN FOERSTER.

February 1930.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

1809–1849

THE POETIC PRINCIPLE (1850)

In speaking of the Poetic Principle, I have no design to be either thorough or profound. While discussing, very much at random, the essentiality of what we call Poetry, my principal purpose will be to cite for consideration, some few of those minor English or American poems which best suit my own taste, or which, upon my own fancy, have left the most definite impression. By 'minor poems' I mean, of course, poems of little length. And here, in the beginning, permit me to say a few words in regard to a somewhat peculiar principle, which, whether rightfully or wrongfully, has always had its influence in my own critical estimate of the poem. I hold that a long poem does not exist. I maintain that the phrase, 'a long poem', is simply a flat contradiction in terms.

I need scarcely observe that a poem deserves its title only inasmuch as it excites, by elevating the soul. The value of the poem is in the ratio of this elevating excitement. But all excitements are, through a psychal necessity, transient. That degree of excitement which would entitle a poem to be so called at all, cannot be sustained throughout a composition of any great length. After the lapse of half an hour, at the very utmost, it flags—fails—a revulsion ensues—and then the poem is, in effect, and in fact, no longer such.

There are, no doubt, many who have found diffi-

culty in reconciling the critical dictum that the *Paradise Lost* is to be devoutly admired throughout, with the absolute impossibility of maintaining for it, during perusal, the amount of enthusiasm which that critical dictum would demand. This great work, in fact, is to be regarded as poetical, only when, losing sight of that vital requisite in all works of Art, Unity, we view it merely as a series of minor poems. If, to preserve its Unity—its totality of effect or impression—we read it (as would be necessary) at a single sitting, the result is but a constant alternation of excitement and depression. After a passage of what we feel to be true poetry, there follows, inevitably, a passage of platitude which no critical pre-judgment can force us to admire; but if, upon completing the work, we read it again; omitting the first book—that is to say, commencing with the second—we shall be surprised at now finding that admirable which we before condemned—that damnable which we had previously so much admired. It follows from all this that the ultimate, aggregate, or absolute effect of even the best epic under the sun, is a nullity:—and this is precisely the fact.

In regard to the *Iliad*, we have, if not positive proof, at least very good reason, for believing it intended as a series of lyrics; but, granting the epic intention, I can say only that the work is based on an imperfect sense of Art. The modern epic is, of the supposititious ancient model, but an inconsiderate and blindfold imitation. But the day of these artistic anomalies is over. If, at any time, any very long poem *were* popular in reality, which I doubt, it is at least clear that no very long poem will ever be popular again.

That the extent of a poetical work is, *ceteris paribus*, the measure of its merit, seems undoubtedly, when we thus state it, a proposition sufficiently absurd—yet we are indebted for it to the Quarterly Reviews. Surely there can be nothing in mere *size*, abstractly considered—there can be nothing in mere *bulk*, so far as a volume is concerned, which has so continuously elicited admiration from these saturnine pamphlets! A mountain, to be sure, by the mere sentiment of physical magnitude which it conveys, *does* impress us with a sense of the sublime—but no man is impressed after *this* fashion by the material grandeur of even *The Columbiad*. Even the Quarterlies have not instructed us to be so impressed by it. *As yet*, they have not *insisted* on our estimating Lamartine by the cubic foot, or Pollok by the pound—but what else are we to *infer* from their continued prating about 'sustained effort'? If, by 'sustained effort', any little gentleman has accomplished an epic, let us frankly commend him for the effort—if this indeed be a thing commendable—but let us forbear praising the epic on the effort's account. It is to be hoped that common sense, in the time to come, will prefer deciding upon a work of art, rather by the impression it makes, by the effect it produces, than by the time it took to impress the effect or by the amount of 'sustained effort' which had been found necessary in effecting the impression. The fact is, that perseverence is one thing, and genius quite another—nor can all the Quarterlies in Christendom confound them. By-and-by, this proposition, with many which I have been just urging, will be received as self-evident. In the mean time, by being gene-

rally condemned as falsities, they will not be essentially damaged as truths.

On the other hand, it is clear that a poem may be improperly brief. Undue brevity degenerates into mere epigrammatism. A *very* short poem, while now and then producing a brilliant or vivid, never produces a profound or enduring effect. There must be the steady pressing down of the stamp upon the wax. De Béranger has wrought innumerable things, pungent and spirit-stirring; but, in general, they have been too imponderous to stamp themselves deeply into the public attention; and thus, as so many feathers of fancy, have been blown aloft only to be whistled down the wind.

A remarkable instance of the effect of undue brevity in depressing a poem—in keeping it out of the popular view—is afforded by the following exquisite little Serenade:

I arise from dreams of thee
  In the first sweet sleep of night,
When the winds are breathing low,
  And the stars are shining bright;
I arise from dreams of thee,
  And a spirit in my feet
Has led me—who knows how?—
  To thy chamber-window, sweet!

The wandering airs, they faint
  On the dark, the silent stream—
The champak odors fail
  Like sweet thoughts in a dream;
The nightingale's complaint,
  It dies upon her heart,
As I must die on thine,
  O, beloved as thou art!

O, lift me from the grass!
I die, I faint, I fail!
Let thy love in kisses rain
On my lips and eyelids pale.
My cheek is cold and white, alas!
My heart beats loud and fast:
Oh! press it close to thine again,
Where it will break at last!

Very few, perhaps, are familiar with these lines—yet no less a poet than Shelley is their author. Their warm, yet delicate and ethereal imagination will be appreciated by all—but by none so thoroughly as by him who has himself arisen from sweet dreams of one beloved to bathe in the aromatic air of a southern midsummer night.

One of the finest poems by Willis—the very best in my opinion, which he has ever written—has, no doubt, through this same defect of undue brevity, been kept back from its proper position, not less in the critical than in the popular view.

The shadows lay along Broadway,
'Twas near the twilight tide,
And slowly there a lady fair
Was walking in her pride.
Along walked she; but, viewlessly,
Walked spirits at her side.

Peace charmed the street beneath her feet
And Honour charmed the air;
And all astir looked kind on her,
And called her good as fair,
For all God ever gave to her
She kept with chary care.

She kept with care her beauties rare
From lovers warm and true,

For her heart was cold to all but gold,
And the rich came not to woo—
But honoured well are charms to sell
If priests the selling do.

Now walking there was one more fair—
A slight girl, lily pale;
And she had unseen company
To make the spirit quail:
'Twixt Want and Scorn she walked forlorn,
And nothing could avail.

No mercy now can clear her brow
For this world's peace to pray;
For, as love's wild prayer dissolved in air,
Her woman's heart gave way!—
But the sin forgiven by Christ in heaven
By man is cursed alway!

In this composition we find it difficult to recognize the Willis who has written so many mere 'verses of society'. The lines are not only richly ideal, but full of energy; while they breathe an earnestness—an evident sincerity of sentiment—for which we look in vain throughout all the other works of this author.

While the epic mania—while the idea that, to merit in poetry, prolixity is indispensable—has, for some years past, been gradually dying out of the public mind, by mere dint of its own absurdity—we find it succeeded by a heresy too palpably false to be long tolerated, but one which, in the brief period it has already endured, may be said to have accomplished more in the corruption of our Poetical Literature than all its other enemies combined. I allude to the heresy of *The Didactic*. It has been

assumed, tacitly and avowedly, directly and indirectly, that the ultimate object of all Poetry is Truth. Every poem, it is said, should inculcate a moral; and by this moral is the poetical merit of the work to be adjudged. We Americans especially have patronized this happy idea; and we Bostonians, very especially, have developed it in full. We have taken it into our heads that to write a poem simply for the poem's sake, and to acknowledge such to have been our design, would be to confess ourselves radically wanting in the true Poetic dignity and force:—but the simple fact is, that, would we but permit ourselves to look into our own souls, we should immediately there discover that under the sun there neither exists nor *can* exist any work more thoroughly dignified—more supremely noble than this very poem—this poem *per se*—this poem which is a poem and nothing more—this poem written solely for the poem's sake.

With as deep a reverence for the True as ever inspired the bosom of man, I would, nevertheless, limit, in some measure, its modes of inculcation. I would limit to enforce them. I would not enfeeble them by dissipation. The demands of Truth are severe. She has no sympathy with the myrtles. All *that* which is so indispensable in Song, is precisely all *that* with which *she* has nothing whatever to do. It is but making her a flaunting paradox, to wreathe her in gems and flowers. In enforcing a truth, we need severity rather than efflorescence of language. We must be simple, precise, terse. We must be cool, calm, unimpassioned. In a word, we must be in that mood which, as nearly as possible, is the exact converse of the poetical.

He must be blind, indeed, who does not perceive the radical and chasmal differences between the truthful and the poetical modes of inculcation. He must be theory-mad beyond redemption who, in spite of these differences, shall still persist in attempting to reconcile the obstinate oils and waters of Poetry and Truth.

Dividing the world of mind into its three most obvious distinctions, we have the Pure Intellect, Taste, and the Moral Sense. I place Taste in the middle, because it is just this position which in the mind it occupies. It holds intimate relations with either extreme; but from the Moral Sense is separated by so faint a difference that Aristotle has not hesitated to place some of its operations among the virtues themselves. Nevertheless, we find the *offices* of the trio marked with a sufficient distinction. Just as the Intellect concerns itself with Truth, so Taste informs us of the Beautiful while the Moral Sense is regardful of Duty. Of this latter, while Conscience teaches the obligation, and Reason the expediency, Taste contents herself with displaying the charms:—waging war upon Vice solely on the ground of her deformity—her disproportion, her animosity to the fitting, to the appropriate, to the harmonious—in a word, to Beauty.

An immortal instinct, deep within the spirit of man, is thus, plainly, a sense of the Beautiful. This it is which administers to his delight in the manifold forms, and sounds, and odors, and sentiments amid which he exists. And just as the lily is repeated in the lake, or the eyes of Amaryllis in the mirror, so is the mere oral or written repetition of these forms, and sounds, and colors, and odors, and sentiments,

a duplicate source of delight. But this mere repetition is not poetry. He who shall simply sing, with however glowing enthusiasm, or with however vivid a truth of description, of the sights, and sounds, and odors, and colors, and sentiments, which greet *him* in common with all mankind—he, I say, has yet failed to prove his divine title. There is still a something in the distance which he has been unable to attain. We have still a thirst unquenchable, to allay which he has not shown us the crystal springs. This thirst belongs to the immortality of Man. It is at once a consequence and an indication of his perennial existence. It is the desire of the moth for the star. It is no mere appreciation of the Beauty before us—but a wild effort to reach the Beauty above. Inspired by an ecstatic prescience of the glories beyond the grave, we struggle, by multiform combinations among the things and thoughts of Time, to attain a portion of that Loveliness whose very elements, perhaps, appertain to eternity alone. And thus when by Poetry—or when by Music, the most entrancing of the Poetic moods—we find ourselves melted into tears—we weep then—not as the Abbaté Gravina supposes—through excess of pleasure, but through a certain, petulant, impatient sorrow at our inability to grasp *now*, wholly, here on earth, at once and forever, those divine and rapturous joys, of which *through* the poem, or *through* the music, we attain to but brief and indeterminate glimpses.

The struggle to apprehend the supernal Loveliness—this struggle, on the part of souls fittingly constituted—has given to the world all *that* which it (the world) has ever been enabled at once to understand and *to feel* as poetic.

The Poetic Sentiment, of course, may develop itself in various modes—in Painting, in Sculpture, in Architecture, in the Dance—very especially in Music—and very peculiarly, and with a wide field, in the composition of the Landscape Garden. Our present theme, however, has regard only to its manifestation in words. And here let me speak briefly on the topic of rhythm. Contenting myself with the certainty that Music, in its various modes of metre, rhythm, and rhyme, is of so vast a moment in Poetry as never to be wisely rejected—is so vitally important an adjunct, that he is simply silly who declines its assistance, I will not now pause to maintain its absolute essentiality. It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles—the creation of supernal Beauty. It *may* be, indeed, that here this sublime end is, now and then, attained *in fact*. We are often made to feel, with a shivering delight, that from an earthly harp are stricken notes which *cannot* have been unfamiliar to the angels. And thus there can be little doubt that in the union of Poetry with Music in its popular sense, we shall find the widest field for the Poetic development. The old Bards and Minnesingers had advantages which we do not possess—and Thomas Moore, singing his own songs, was, in the most legitimate manner, perfecting them as poems.

To recapitulate, then:—I would define, in brief, the Poetry of words as *The Rhythmical Creation of Beauty*. Its sole arbiter is Taste. With the Intellect or with the Conscience, it has only collateral relations. Unless incidentally, it has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth.

A few words, however, in explanation. *That* pleasure which is at once the most pure, the most elevating, and the most intense, is derived, I maintain, from the contemplation of the Beautiful. In the contemplation of Beauty we alone find it possible to attain that pleasurable elevation, or excitement, *of the soul*, which we recognize as the Poetic Sentiment, and which is so easily distinguished from Truth, which is the satisfaction of the Reason, or from Passion, which is the excitement of the heart. I make Beauty, therefore—using the word as inclusive of the sublime—I make Beauty the province of the poem, simply because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring as directly as possible from their causes:—no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation in question is at least *most readily* attainable in the poem. It by no means follows, however, that the incitements of Passion, or the precepts of Duty, or even the lessons of Truth, may not be introduced into a poem, and with advantage; for they may subserve, incidentally, in various ways, the general purposes of the work:—but the true artist will always contrive to tone them down in proper subjection to that *Beauty* which is the atmosphere and the real essence of the poem.

I cannot better introduce the few poems which I shall present for your consideration, than by the citation of the Proem to Mr. Longfellow's 'Waif':

> The day is done, and the darkness
> Falls from the wings of Night,
> As a feather is wafted downward
> From an eagle in his flight.

I see the lights of the village
  Gleam through the rain and the mist,
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me,
  That my soul cannot resist:

A feeling of sadness and longing,
  That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
  As the mist resembles the rain.

Come, read to me some poem,
  Some simple and heartfelt lay,
That shall soothe this restless feeling,
  And banish the thoughts of day.

Not from the grand old masters,
  Not from the bards sublime,
Whose distant footsteps echo
  Through the corridors of Time.

For, like strains of martial music,
  Their mighty thoughts suggest
Life's endless toil and endeavor;
  And to-night I long for rest.

Read from some humbler poet,
  Whose songs gushed from his heart,
As showers from the clouds of summer,
  Or tears from the eyelids start;

Who through long days of labor,
  And nights devoid of ease,
Still heard in his soul the music
  Of wonderful melodies.

Such songs have power to quiet
  The restless pulse of care,
And come like the benediction
  That follows after prayer.

Then read from the treasured volume
The poem of thy choice,
And lend to the rhyme of the poet
The beauty of thy voice.

And the night shall be filled with music,
And the cares that infest the day,
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.

With no great range of imagination, these lines have been justly admired for their delicacy of expression. Some of the images are very effective. Nothing can be better than—

———The bards sublime
Whose distant footsteps echo
Down the corridors of Time.

The idea of the last quatrain is also very effective. The poem, on the whole, however, is chiefly to be admired for the graceful *insouciance* of its metre, so well in accordance with the character of the sentiments, and especially for the *ease* of the general manner. This 'ease', or naturalness, in a literary style, it has long been the fashion to regard as ease in appearance alone—as a point of really difficult attainment. But not so:—a natural manner is difficult only to him who should never meddle with it—to the unnatural. It is but the result of writing with the understanding, or with the instinct, that *the tone*, in composition, should always be that which the mass of mankind would adopt—and must perpetually vary, of course, with the occasion. The author who, after the fashion of the *North American Review*, should be, upon *all* occasions, merely 'quiet', must necessarily upon *many* occasions, be simply silly, or stupid; and has no more right to be con-

sidered 'easy', or 'natural', than a Cockney exquisite, or than the sleeping Beauty in the wax-works.

Among the minor poems of Bryant, none has so much impressed me as the one which he entitles 'June'. I quote only a portion of it:

There, through the long, long summer hours,
The golden light should lie,
And thick young herbs and groups of flowers
Stand in their beauty by.
The oriole should build and tell
His love-tale, close beside my cell;
The idle butterfly
Should rest him there, and there be heard
The housewife-bee and humming bird.

And what if cheerful shouts at noon
Come, from the village sent,
Or songs of maids, beneath the moon,
With fairy laughter blent?
And what if, in the evening light,
Betrothed lovers walk in sight
Of my low monument?
I would the lovely scene around
Might know no sadder sight nor sound.

I know, I know I should not see
The season's glorious show,
Nor would its brightness shine for me,
Nor its wild music flow;
But if, around my place of sleep,
The friends I love should come to weep,
They might not haste to go.
Soft airs, and song, and light and bloom
Should keep them lingering by my tomb.

These to their soften'd hearts should bear
The thought of what has been,
And speak of one who cannot share
The gladness of the scene;

Whose part, in all the pomp that fills
The circuit of the summer hills,
Is—that his grave is green;
And deeply would their hearts rejoice
To hear again his living voice.

The rhythmical flow, here, is even voluptuous—nothing could be more melodious. The poem has always affected me in a remarkable manner. The intense melancholy which seems to well up, perforce, to the surface of all the poet's cheerful sayings about his grave, we find thrilling us to the soul—while there is the truest poetic elevation in the thrill. The impression left is one of a pleasurable sadness. And if, in the remaining compositions which I shall introduce to you, there be more or less of a similar tone always apparent, let me remind you that (how or why we know not) this certain taint of sadness is inseparably connected with all the higher manifestations of true Beauty. It is, nevertheless,

A feeling of sadness and longing
That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
As the mist resembles the rain.

The taint of which I speak is clearly perceptible even in a poem so full of brilliancy and spirit as the 'Health' of Edward Coate Pinkney:

I fill this cup to one made up
Of loveliness alone,
A woman, of her gentle sex
The seeming paragon;
To whom the better elements
And kindly stars have given
A form so fair, that, like the air,
'Tis less of earth than heaven.

Her every tone is music's own,
Like those of morning birds,
And something more than melody
Dwells ever in her words;
The coinage of her heart are they,
And from her lips each flows
As one may see the burdened bee
Forth issue from the rose.

Affections are as thoughts to her,
The measures of her hours;
Her feelings have the fragrancy,
The freshness of young flowers;
And lovely passions, changing oft,
So fill her, she appears
The image of themselves by turns,—
The idol of past years!

Of her bright face one glance will trace
A picture on the brain,
And of her voice in echoing hearts
A sound must long remain;
But memory, such as mine of her,
So very much endears,
When death is nigh my latest sigh
Will not be life's, but hers.

I fill this cup to one made up
Of loveliness alone,
A woman, of her gentle sex
The seeming paragon—
Her health! and would on earth there stood
Some more of such a frame,
That life might be all poetry,
And weariness a name.

It was the misfortune of Mr. Pinkney to have been born too far south. Had he been a New Englander, it is probable that he would have been ranked as the first of American lyrists, by that

magnanimous cabal which has so long controlled the destinies of American Letters, in conducting the thing called the *North American Review*. The poem just cited is especially beautiful; but the poetic elevation which it induces, we must refer chiefly to our sympathy in the poet's enthusiasm. We pardon his hyperboles for the evident earnestness with which they are uttered.

It was by no means my design, however, to expatiate upon the *merits* of what I should read you. These will necessarily speak for themselves. Boccalini, in his *Advertisements from Parnassus*, tells us that Zoilus once presented Apollo a very caustic criticism upon a very admirable book:—whereupon the god asked him for the beauties of the work. He replied that he only busied himself about the errors. On hearing this, Apollo, handing him a sack of unwinnowed wheat, bade him pick out *all the chaff* for his reward.

Now this fable answers very well as a hit at the critics—but I am by no means sure that the god was in the right. I am by no means certain that the true limits of the critical duty are not grossly misunderstood. Excellence, in a poem especially, may be considered in the light of an axiom, which need only be properly *put*, to become self-evident. It is *not* excellence if it require to be demonstrated as such:—and thus, to point out too particularly the merits of a work of Art, is to admit that they are *not* merits altogether.

Among the 'Melodies' of Thomas Moore, is one whose distinguished character as a poem proper, seems to have been singularly left out of view. I allude to his lines beginning—'Come rest in this bosom'.

The intense energy of their expression is not surpassed by anything in Byron. There are two of the lines in which a sentiment is conveyed that embodies the *all in all* of the divine passion of love—a sentiment which, perhaps, has found its echo in more, and in more passionate, human hearts than any other single sentiment ever embodied in words:

Come, rest in this bosom, my own stricken deer,
Though the herd have fled from thee, thy home is still here;
Here still is the smile, that no cloud can o'ercast,
And a heart and a hand all thy own to the last.

Oh! what was love made for, if 'tis not the same
Through joy and through torment, through glory and shame?
I know not, I ask not, if guilt's in that heart,
I but know that I love thee, whatever thou art.

Thou hast call'd me thy Angel in moments of bliss,
And thy Angel I'll be, 'mid the horrors of this,—
Through the furnace, unshrinking, thy steps to pursue,
And shield thee, and save thee,—or perish there too!

It has been the fashion, of late days, to deny Moore imagination, while granting him fancy—a distinction originating with Coleridge—than whom no man more fully comprehended the great powers of Moore. The fact is, that the fancy of this poet so far predominates over all his other faculties, and over the fancy of all other men, as to have induced, very naturally, the idea that he is fanciful *only*. But never was there a greater mistake. Never was a grosser wrong done the fame of a true poet. In the compass of the English language I can call to mind no poem more profoundly—more weirdly *imaginative*, in the best sense, than the lines com-

mencing—'I would I were by that dim lake'—which are the composition of Thomas Moore. I regret that I am unable to remember them.

One of the noblest—and, speaking of fancy, one of the most singularly fanciful of modern poets, was Thomas Hood. His 'Fair Ines' had always, for me, an inexpressible charm:

O saw ye not fair Ines?
She 's gone into the West,
To dazzle when the sun is down,
And rob the world of rest:
She took our daylight with her,
The smiles that we love best,
With morning blushes on her cheek,
And pearls upon her breast.

O turn again, fair Ines,
Before the fall of night,
For fear the Moon should shine alone,
And stars unrivall'd bright;
And blessed will the lover be
That walks beneath their light,
And breathes the love against thy cheek
I dare not even write!

Would I had been, fair Ines,
That gallant cavalier,
Who rode so gaily by thy side,
And whisper'd thee so near!
Were there no bonny dames at home,
Or no true lovers here,
That he should cross the seas to win
The dearest of the dear?

I saw thee, lovely Ines,
Descend along the shore,
With bands of noble gentlemen,
And banners wav'd before;

And gentle youth and maidens gay,
  And snowy plumes they wore;
It would have been a beauteous dream,
  If it had been no more!

Alas, alas, fair Ines,
  She went away with song,
With Music waiting on her steps,
  And shoutings of the throng;
But some were sad, and felt no mirth,
  But only Music's wrong,
In sounds that sang Farewell, Farewell,
  To her you've loved so long.

Farewell, farewell, fair Ines,
  That vessel never bore
So fair a lady on its deck,
  Nor danced so light before,—
Alas for pleasure on the sea,
  And sorrow on the shore!
The smile that blest one lover's heart
  Has broken many more!

'The Haunted House', by the same author, is one of the truest poems ever written—one of the *truest*—one of the most unexceptionable—one of the most thoroughly artistic, both in its theme and in its execution. It is, moreover, powerfully ideal—imaginative. I regret that its length renders it unsuitable for the purposes of this Lecture. In place of it, permit me tô offer the universally appreciated 'Bridge of Sighs'.

One more Unfortunate,
Weary of breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death!

Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care;—
Fashion'd so slenderly,
Young, and so fair!

Look at her garments
Clinging like cerements;
Whilst the wave constantly
Drips from her clothing;
Take her up instantly,
Loving, not loathing.

Touch her not scornfully;
Think of her mournfully,
Gently and humanly;
Not of the stains of her,
All that remains of her
Now is pure womanly.

Make no deep scrutiny
Into her mutiny
Rash and undutiful;
Past all dishonor,
Death has left on her
Only the beautiful.

Still, for all slips of hers,
One of Eve's family—
Wipe those poor lips of hers
Oozing so clammily.
Loop up her tresses
Escaped from the comb,
Her fair auburn tresses;
Whilst wonderment guesses
Where was her home?

Who was her father?
Who was her mother?
Had she a sister?

Had she a brother?
Or was there a dearer one
Still, and a nearer one
Yet, than all other?

Alas! for the rarity
Of Christian charity
Under the sun!
Oh! it was pitiful!
Near a whole city full
Home she had none.

Sisterly, brotherly,
Fatherly, motherly
Feelings had changed:
Love, by harsh evidence,
Thrown from its eminence;
Even God's providence
Seeming estranged.

Where the lamps quiver
So far in the river.
With many a light
From window and casement,
From garret to basement,
She stood, with amazement,
Houseless by night.

The bleak wind of March
Made her tremble and shiver;
But not the dark arch,
Or the black flowing river:
Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery,
Swift to be hurl'd—
Anywhere, anywhere
Out of the world!

In she plunged boldly,
No matter how coldly

The rough river ran—
Over the brink of it,
Picture it,—think of it,
Dissolute Man!
Lave in it, drink of it
Then, if you can!

Take her up tenderly
Lift her with care
Fashion'd so slenderly,
Young, and so fair!
Ere her limbs frigidly
Stiffen too rigidly,
Decently,—kindly,—
Smooth, and compose them;
And her eyes, close them,
Staring so blindly!

Dreadfully staring
Through muddy impurity,
As when with the daring
Last look of despairing
Fixed on futurity.
Perishing gloomily,
Spurred by contumely,
Cold inhumanity,
Burning insanity,
Into her rest,—
Cross her hands humbly,
As if praying dumbly,
Over her breast!

Owning her weakness,
Her evil behavior,
And leaving, with meekness,
Her sins to her Savior!

The vigor of this poem is no less remarkable than its pathos. The versification, although carrying the fanciful to the very verge of the fantastic, is never-

theless admirably adapted to the wild insanity which is the thesis of the poem.

Among the minor poems of Lord Byron, is one which has never received from the critics the praise which it undoubtedly deserves:

Though the day of my destiny's over,
And the star of my fate hath declined,
Thy soft heart refused to discover
The faults which so many could find;
Though thy soul with my grief was acquainted,
It shrunk not to share it with me,
And the love which my spirit hath painted
It never hath found but in *thee*.

Then when nature around me is smiling,
The last smile which answers to mine,
I do not believe it beguiling,
Because it reminds me of thine;
And when winds are at war with the ocean,
As the breasts I believed in with me,
If their billows excite an emotion,
It is that they bear me from *thee*.

Though the rock of my last hope is shivered,
And its fragments are sunk in the wave,
Though I feel that my soul is delivered
To pain—it shall not be its slave.
There is many a pang to pursue me:
They may crush, but they shall not contemn—
They may torture, but shall not subdue me—
'Tis of *thee* that I think—not of them.

Though human, thou didst not deceive me,
Though woman, thou didst not forsake,
Though loved, thou forborest to grieve me,
Though slandered, thou never couldst shake,—

Though trusted, thou didst not disclaim me,
Though parted, it was not to fly,
Though watchful, 'twas not to defame me,
Nor mute, that the world might belie.

Yet I blame not the world, nor despise it,
Nor the war of the many with one—
If my soul was not fitted to prize it,
'Twas folly not sooner to shun:
And if dearly that error hath cost me,
And more than I once could foresee,
I have found that whatever it lost me,
It could not deprive me of *thee*.

From the wreck of the past, which hath perished,
Thus much I at least may recall,
It hath taught me that which I most cherished,
Deserved to be dearest of all:
In the desert a fountain is springing,
In the wide waste there still is a tree,
And a bird in the solitude singing,
Which speaks to my spirit of *thee*.

Although the rhythm here is one of the most difficult, the versification could scarcely be improved. No nobler *theme* ever engaged the pen of poet. It is the soul-elevating idea, that no man can consider himself entitled to complain of Fate while, in his adversity, he still retains the unwavering love of woman.

From Alfred Tennyson—although in perfect sincerity I regard him as the noblest poet that ever lived—I have left myself time to cite only a very brief specimen. I call him, and *think* him the noblest of poets—*not* because the impressions he produces are, at *all* times, the most profound—*not* because the poetical excitement which he induces is, at *all* times, the most intense—but because it *is*, at all times, the

most ethereal—in other words, the most elevating and the most pure. No poet is so little of the earth, earthy. What I am about to read is from his last long poem, *The Princess:*

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.

Thus, although in a very cursory and imperfect manner, I have endeavoured to convey to you my conception of the Poetic Principle. It has been my purpose to suggest that, while this Principle itself is, strictly and simply, the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty, the manifestation of the Principle is always found in *an elevating excitement of the Soul*—quite independent of that passion which is the intoxication of the Heart—or of that truth which is the satisfaction of the Reason. For, in regard to Pas

sion, alas! its tendency is to degrade, rather than to elevate the Soul. Love, on the contrary—Love—the true, the divine Eros—the Uranian, as distinguished from the Dionæan Venus—is unquestionably the purest and truest of all poetical themes. And in regard to Truth—if, to be sure, through the attainment of a truth, we are led to perceive a harmony where none was apparent before, we experience, at once, the true poetical effect—but this effect is referable to the harmony alone, and not in the least degree to the truth which merely served to render the harmony manifest.

We shall reach, however, more immediately a distinct conception of what the true Poetry is, by mere reference to a few of the simple elements which induce in the Poet himself the true poetical effect. He recognizes the ambrosia which nourishes his soul, in the bright orbs that shine in Heaven—in the volutes of the flower—in the clustering of low shrubberies—in the waving of the grain-fields—in the slanting of tall, Eastern trees—in the blue distance of mountains—in the grouping of clouds—in the twinkling of half-hidden brooks—in the gleaming of silver rivers—in the repose of sequestered lakes—in the star-mirroring depths of lonely wells. He perceives it in the songs of birds—in the harp of Æolus—in the sighing of the night-wind—in the repining voice of the forest—in the surf that complains to the shore—in the fresh breath of the woods—in the scent of the violet—in the voluptuous perfume of the hyacinth—in the suggestive odor that comes to him, at eventide, from far-distant, undiscovered islands, over dim oceans, illimitable and unexplored. He owns it in all noble

thoughts—in all unworldly motives—in all holy impulses—in all chivalrous, generous, and self-sacrificing deeds. He feels it in the beauty of woman—in the grace of her step—in the lustre of her eye—in the melody of her voice—in her soft laughter—in her sigh—in the harmony of the rustling of her robes. He deeply feels it in her winning endearments—in her burning enthusiasms—in her gentle charities—in her meek and devotional endurances—but above all—ah, far above all—he kneels to it—he worships it in the faith, in the purity, in the strength, in the altogether divine majesty—of her *love*.

Let me conclude—by the recitation of yet another brief poem—one very different in character from any that I have before quoted. It is by Motherwell, and is called 'The Song of the Cavalier'. With our modern and altogether rational ideas of the absurdity and impiety of warfare, we are not precisely in that frame of mind best adapted to sympathize with the sentiments, and thus to appreciate the real excellence of the poem. To do this fully, we must identify ourselves, in fancy, with the soul of the old cavalier.

Then mounte! then mounte, brave gallants, all,
And don your helmes amaine:
Death's couriers, Fame and Honor, call
Us to the field againe.
No shrewish teares shall fill our eye
When the sword-hilt's in our hand,—
Heart-whole we'll part, and no whit sighe
For the fayrest of the land;
Let piping swaine, and craven wight,
Thus weepe and puling crye,
Our business is like men to fight,
And hero-like to die!

RALPH WALDO EMERSON

1803–1882

MONTAIGNE; OR, THE SKEPTIC (1850)

Every fact is related on one side to sensation, and on the other to morals. The game of thought is, on the appearance of one of these two sides, to find the other: given the upper, to find the under side. Nothing so thin but has these two faces, and when the observer has seen the obverse, he turns it over to see the reverse. Life is a pitching of this penny, —heads or tails. We never tire of this game, because there is still a slight shudder of astonishment at the exhibition of the other face, at the contrast of the two faces. A man is flushed with success, and bethinks himself what this good luck signifies. He drives his bargain in the street; but it occurs that he also is bought and sold. He sees the beauty of a human face, and searches the cause of that beauty, which must be more beautiful. He builds his fortunes, maintains the laws, cherishes his children; but he asks himself, Why? and whereto? This head and this tail are called, in the language of philosophy, Infinite and Finite; Relative and Absolute; Apparent and Real; and many fine names beside.

Each man is born with a predisposition to one or the other of these sides of nature; and it will easily happen that men will be found devoted to one or the other. One class has the perception of difference, and is conversant with facts and surfaces,

cities and persons, and the bringing certain things to pass;—the men of talent and action. Another class have the perception of identity, and are men of faith and philosophy, men of genius.

Each of these riders drives too fast. Plotinus believes only in philosophers; Fenelon, in saints; Pindar and Byron, in poets. Read the haughty language in which Plato and the Platonists speak of all men who are not devoted to their own shining abstractions: other men are rats and mice. The literary class is usually proud and exclusive. The correspondence of Pope and Swift describes mankind around them as monsters; and that of Goethe and Schiller, in our own time, is scarcely more kind.

It is easy to see how this arrogance comes. The genius is a genius by the first look he casts on any object. Is his eye creative? Does he not rest in angles and colors, but beholds the design?—he will presently undervalue the actual object. In powerful moments, his thought has dissolved the works of art and nature into their causes, so that the works appear heavy and faulty. He has a conception of beauty which the sculptor cannot embody. Picture, statue, temple, railroad, steam-engine, existed first in an artist's mind, without flaw, mistake, or friction, which impair the executed models. So did the Church, the State, college, court, social circle, and all the institutions. It is not strange that these men, remembering what they have seen and hoped of ideas, should affirm disdainfully the superiority of ideas. Having at some time seen that the happy soul will carry all the arts in power, they say, Why cumber ourselves with superfluous realizations?

and like dreaming beggars they assume to speak and act as if these values were already substantiated.

On the other part, the men of toil and trade and luxury,—the animal world, including the animal in the philosopher and poet also, and the practical world, including the painful drudgeries which are never excused to philosopher or poet any more than to the rest,—weigh heavily on the other side. The trade in our streets believes in no metaphysical causes, thinks nothing of the force which necessitated traders and a trading planet to exist: no, but sticks to cotton, sugar, wool and salt. The ward meetings, on election days, are not softened by any misgiving of the value of these ballotings. Hot life is streaming in a single direction. To the men of this world, to the animal strength and spirits, to the men of practical power, whilst immersed in it, the man of ideas appears out of his reason. They alone have reason.

Things always bring their own philosophy with them, that is, prudence. No man acquires property without acquiring with it a little arithmetic also. In England, the richest country that ever existed, property stands for more, compared with personal ability, than in any other. After dinner, a man believes less, denies more: verities have lost some charm. After dinner, arithmetic is the only science: ideas are disturbing, incendiary, follies of young men, repudiated by the solid portion of society: and a man comes to be valued by his athletic and animal qualities. Spence relates that Mr. Pope was with Sir Godfrey Kneller one day, when his nephew, a Guinea trader, came in. 'Nephew,' said Sir Godfrey, 'you have the honour of seeing the two greatest men

in the world.' 'I don't know how great men you may be,' said the Guinea man, 'but I don't like your looks. I have often bought a man much better than both of you, all muscles and bones, for ten guineas.' Thus the men of the senses revenge themselves on the professors and repay scorn for scorn. The first had leaped to conclusions not yet ripe, and say more than is true; the others make themselves merry with the philosopher, and weigh man by the pound. They believe that mustard bites the tongue, that pepper is hot, friction-matches incendiary, revolvers are to be avoided, and suspenders hold up pantaloons; that there is much sentiment in a chest of tea; and a man will be eloquent, if you give him good wine. Are you tender and scrupulous,—you must eat more mince-pie. They hold that Luther had milk in him when he said,—

> Wer nicht liebt Wein, Weiber, Gesang,
> Der bleibt ein Narr sein Leben lang;—

and when he advised a young scholar, perplexed with fore-ordination and free-will, to get well drunk. 'The nerves,' says Cabanis, 'they are the man.' My neighbor, a jolly farmer, in the tavern bar-room, thinks that the use of money is sure and speedy spending. For his part, he says, he puts his down his neck and gets the good if it.

The inconvenience of this way of thinking is that it runs into indifferentism and then into disgust. Life is eating us up. We shall be fables presently. Keep cool: it will be all one a hundred years hence. Life's well enough, but we shall be glad to get out of it, and they will all be glad to have us. Why should we fret and drudge? Our meat will

taste to-morrow as it did yesterday, and we may at last have had enough of it. 'Ah,' said my languid gentleman at Oxford, 'there's nothing new or true, —and no matter.'

With a little more bitterness, the cynic moans; our life is like an ass led to market by a bundle of hay being carried before him; he sees nothing but the bundle of hay. 'There is so much trouble in coming into the world,' said Lord Bolingbroke, 'and so much more, as well as meanness, in going out of it, that 'tis hardly worth while to be here at all.' I knew a philosopher of this kidney who was accustomed briefly to sum up his experience of human nature in saying, 'Mankind is a damned rascal:' and the natural corollary is pretty sure to follow,— 'The world lives by humbug, and so will I.'

The abstractionist and the materialist thus mutually exasperating each other, and the scoffer expressing the worst of materialism, there arises a third party to occupy the middle ground between these two, the skeptic, namely. He finds both wrong by being in extremes. He labors to plant his feet, to be the beam of the balance. He will not go beyond his card. He sees the one-sidedness of these men of the street; he will not be a Gibeonite; he stands for the intellectual faculties, a cool head and whatever serves to keep it cool; no unadvised industry, no unrewarded self-devotion, no loss of the brains in toil. Am I an ox, or a dray?—You are both in extremes, he says. You that will have all solid, and a world of pig-lead, deceive yourselves grossly. You believe yourselves rooted and grounded on adamant; and yet, if we uncover the last facts of our knowledge, you are spinning like

bubbles in a river, you know not whither or whence, and you are bottomed and capped and wrapped in delusions. Neither will he be betrayed to a book and wrapped in a gown. The studious class are their own victims; they are thin and pale, their feet are cold, their heads are hot, the night is without sleep, the day a fear of interruption,—pallor, squalor, hunger and egotism. If you come near them and see what conceits they entertain,—they are abstractionists, and spend their days and nights in dreaming some dream; in expecting the homage of society to some precious scheme, built on a truth, but destitute of proportion in its presentment, of justness in its application, and of all energy of will in the schemer to embody and vitalize it.

But I see plainly, he says, that I cannot see. I know that human strength is not in extremes, but in avoiding extremes. I, at least, will shun the weakness of philosophizing beyond my depth. What is the use of pretending to powers we have not? What is the use of pretending to assurances we have not, respecting the other life? Why exaggerate the power of virtue? Why be an angel before your time? These strings, wound up too high, will snap. If there is a wish for immortality, and no evidence, why not say just that? If there are conflicting evidences, why not state them? If there is not ground for a candid thinker to make up his mind, yea or nay,—why not suspend the judgment? I weary of these dogmatizers. I tire of these hacks of routine, who deny the dogmas. I neither affirm nor deny. I stand here to try the case. I am here to consider, σκοπεῖν, to consider how it is. I will try to keep the balance true. Of what use to

take the chair and glibly rattle off theories of society, religion and nature, when I know that practical objections lie in the way, insurmountable by me and by my mates? Why so talkative in public, when each of my neighbors can pin me to my seat by arguments I cannot refute? Why pretend that life is so simple a game, when we know how subtle and elusive the Proteus is? Why think to shut up all things in your narrow coop, when we know there are not one or two only, but ten, twenty, a thousand things, and unlike? Why fancy that you have all the truth in your keeping? There is much to say on all sides.

Who shall forbid a wise skepticism, seeing that there is no practical question on which any thing more than an approximate solution can be had? Is not marriage an open question, when it is alleged, from the beginning of the world, that such as are in the institution wish to get out, and such as are out wish to get in? And the reply of Socrates, to him who asked whether he should choose a wife, still remains reasonable, that 'whether he should choose one or not, he would repent it'. Is not the State a question? All society is divided in opinion on the subject of the State. Nobody loves it; great numbers dislike it and suffer conscientious scruples to allegiance; and the only defence set up, is the fear of doing worse in disorganizing. Is it otherwise with the Church? Or, to put any of the questions which touch mankind nearest,—shall the young man aim at a leading part in law, in politics, in trade? It will not be pretended that a success in either of these kinds is quite coincident with what is best and inmost in his mind. Shall he then, cutting the stays

that hold him fast to the social state, put out to sea with no guidance but his genius? There is much to say on both sides. Remember the open question between the present order of 'competition' and the friends of 'attractive and associated labor'. The generous minds embrace the proposition of labor shared by all; it is the only honesty; nothing else is safe. It is from the poor man's hut alone that strength and virtue come: and yet, on the other side, it is alleged that labor impairs the form and breaks the spirit of man, and the laborers cry unanimously, 'We have no thoughts'. Culture, how indispensable! I cannot forgive you the want of accomplishments; and yet culture will instantly impair that chiefest beauty of spontaneousness. Excellent is culture for a savage; but once let him read in the book, and he is no longer able not to think of Plutarch's heroes. In short, since true fortitude of understanding consists 'in not letting what we know be embarrassed by what we do not know', we ought to secure those advantages which we can command, and not risk them by clutching after the airy and unattainable. Come, no chimeras! Let us go abroad; let us mix in affairs; let us learn and get and have and climb. 'Men are a sort of moving plants, and, like trees, receive a great part of their nourishment from the air. If they keep too much at home, they pine.' Let us have a robust, manly life; let us know what we know, for certain; what we have, let it be solid and seasonable and our own. A world in the hand is worth two in the bush. Let us have to do with real men and women, and not with skipping ghosts.

This then is the right ground of the skeptic,—

this of consideration, of self-containing; not at all of unbelief; not at all of universal denying, nor of universal doubting,—doubting even that he doubts; least of all of scoffing and profligate jeering at all that is stable and good. These are no more his moods than are those of religion and philosophy. He is the considerer, the prudent, taking in sail, counting stock, husbanding his means, believing that a man has too many enemies than that he can afford to be his own foe; that we cannot give ourselves too many advantages in this unequal conflict, with powers so vast and unweariable ranged on one side, and this little conceited vulnerable popinjay that a man is, bobbing up and down into every danger, on the other. It is a position taken up for better defence, as of more safety, and one that can be maintained; and it is one of more opportunity and range: as, when we build a house, the rule is to set it not too high nor too low, under the wind, but out of the dirt.

The philosophy we want is one of fluxions and mobility. The Spartan and Stoic schemes are too stark and stiff for our occasion. A theory of Saint John, and of non-resistance, seems, on the other hand, too thin and aerial. We want some coat woven of elastic steel, stout as the first and limber as the second. We want a ship in these billows we inhabit. An angular, dogmatic house would be rent to chips and splinters in this storm of many elements. No, it must be tight, and fit to the form of man, to live at all; as a shell must dictate the architecture of a house founded on the sea. The soul of man must be the type of our scheme, just as the body of man is the type after which a dwelling-

house is built. Adaptiveness is the peculiarity of human nature. We are golden averages, volitant stabilities, compensated or periodic errors, houses founded on the sea. The wise skeptic wishes to have a near view of the best game and the chief players; what is best in the planet; art and nature, places and events; but mainly men. Every thing that is excellent in mankind,—a form of grace, an arm of iron, lips of persuasion, a brain of resources, every one skilful to play and win,—he will see and judge.

The terms of admission to this spectacle are, that he have a certain solid and intelligible way of living of his own; some method of answering the inevitable needs of human life; proof that he has played with skill and success; that he has evinced the temper, stoutness and the range of qualities which, among his contemporaries and countrymen, entitle him to fellowship and trust. For the secrets of life are not shown except to sympathy and likeness. Men do not confide themselves to boys, or coxcombs, or pedants, but to their peers. Some wise limitation, as the modern phrase is; some condition between the extremes, and having, itself, a positive quality; some stark and sufficient man, who is not salt or sugar, but sufficiently related to the world to do justice to Paris or London, and, at the same time, a vigorous and original thinker, whom cities can not overawe, but who uses them,—is the fit person to occupy this ground of speculation.

These qualities meet in the character of Montaigne. And yet, since the personal regard which I entertain for Montaigne may be unduly great, I will, under the shield of this prince of egotists, offer, as an apology for electing him as the representative

of skepticism, a word or two to explain how my love began and grew for this admirable gossip.

A single odd volume of Cotton's translation of the Essays remained to me from my father's library, when a boy. It lay long neglected, until, after many years, when I was newly escaped from college, I read the book, and procured the remaining volumes. I remember the delight and wonder in which I lived with it. It seemed to me as if I had myself written the book, in some former life, so sincerely it spoke to my thought and experience. It happened, when in Paris, in 1833, that, in the cemetery of Père Lachaise, I came to a tomb of Auguste Collignon, who died in 1830, aged sixty-eight years, and who, said the monument, 'lived to do right, and had formed himself to virtue on the Essays of Montaigne'. Some years later, I became acquainted with an accomplished English poet, John Sterling; and, in prosecuting my correspondence, I found that, from a love of Montaigne, he had made a pilgrimage to his chateau, still standing near Castellan, in Périgord, and, after two hundred and fifty years, had copied from the walls of his library the inscriptions which Montaigne had written there. That Journal of Mr. Sterling's, published in the *Westminster Review*, Mr. Hazlitt has reprinted in the *Prolegomena* to his edition of the Essays. I heard with pleasure that one of the newly-discovered autographs of William Shakespeare was in a copy of Florio's translation of Montaigne. It is the only book which we certainly know to have been in the poet's library. And, oddly enough, the duplicate copy of Florio, which the British Museum purchased, with a view of protecting the Shakespeare

autograph (as I was informed in the Museum), turned out to have the autograph of Ben Jonson in the fly-leaf. Leigh Hunt relates of Lord Byron, that Montaigne was the only great writer of past times whom he read with avowed satisfaction. Other coincidences, not needful to be mentioned here, concurred to make this old Gascon still new and immortal for me.

In 1571, on the death of his father, Montaigne, then thirty-eight years old, retired from the practice of law at Bordeaux, and settled himself on his estate. Though he had been a man of pleasure and sometimes a courtier, his studious habits now grew on him, and he loved the compass, staidness, and independence of the country gentleman's life. He took up his economy in good earnest, and made his farms yield the most. Downright and plain-dealing, and abhorring to be deceived or to deceive, he was esteemed in the country for his sense and probity. In the civil wars of the League, which converted every house into a fort, Montaigne kept his gates open and his house without defence. All parties freely came and went, his courage and honor being universally esteemed. The neighboring lords and gentry brought jewels and papers to him for safe-keeping. Gibbon reckons, in these bigoted times, but two men of liberality in France,—Henry IV and Montaigne.

Montaigne is the frankest and honestest of all writers. His French freedom runs into grossness; but he has anticipated all censure by the bounty of his own confessions. In his times, books were written to one sex only, and almost all were written in Latin; so that in a humorist a certain nakedness of

statement was permitted, which our manners, of a literature addressed equally to both sexes, do not allow. But though a biblical plainness coupled with a most uncanonical levity may shut his pages to many sensitive readers, yet the offence is superficial. He parades it: he makes the most of it: nobody can think or say worse of him than he does. He pretends to most of the vices; and, if there be any virtue in him, he says, it got in by stealth. There is no man, in his opinion, who has not deserved hanging five or six times; and he pretends no exception in his own behalf. 'Five or six as ridiculous stories', too, he says, 'can be told of me, as of any man living.' But, with all this really superfluous frankness, the opinion of an invincible probity grows into every reader's mind. 'When I the most strictly and religiously confess myself, I find that the best virtue I have has in it some tincture of vice; and I, who am as sincere and perfect a lover of virtue of that stamp as any other whatever, am afraid that Plato, in his purest virtue, if he had listened and laid his ear close to himself, would have heard some jarring sound of human mixture; but faint and remote and only to be perceived by himself.'

Here is an impatience and fastidiousness at color or pretence of any kind. He has been in courts so long as to have conceived a furious disgust at appearances; he will indulge himself with a little cursing and swearing; he will talk with sailors and gypsies, use flash and street ballads; he has stayed in-doors till he is deadly sick; he will to the open air, though it rain bullets. He has seen too much of gentlemen of the long robe, until he wishes for cannibals; and is so nervous, by factitious life, that

he thinks the more barbarous man is, the better he is. He likes his saddle. You may read theology, and grammar, and metaphysics elsewhere. Whatever you get here shall smack of the earth and of real life, sweet, or smart, or stinging. He makes no hesitation to entertain you with the records of his disease, and his journey to Italy is quite full of that matter. He took and kept this position of equilibrium. Over his name he drew an emblematic pair of scales, and wrote *Que sçais je?* under it. As I look at his effigy opposite the title-page, I seem to hear him say, 'You may play old Poz, if you will; you may rail and exaggerate,—I stand here for truth, and will not, for all the states and churches and revenues and personal reputations of Europe, overstate the dry fact, as I see it; I will rather mumble and prose about what I certainly know,—my house and barns; my father, my wife and my tenants; my old lean bald pate; my knives and forks; what meats I eat and what drinks I prefer, and a hundred straws just as ridiculous,—than I will write, with a fine crow-quill, a fine romance. I like gray days, and autumn and winter weather. I am gray and autumnal myself, and think an undress and old shoes that do not pinch my feet, and old friends who do not constrain me, and plain topics where I do not need to strain myself and pump my brains, the most suitable. Our condition as men is risky and ticklish enough. One can not be sure of himself and his fortune an hour, but he may be whisked off into some pitiable or ridiculous plight. Why should I vapor and play the philosopher, instead of ballasting, the best I can, this dancing balloon? So, at least, I live within compass, keep myself ready for

action, and can shoot the gulf at last with decency. If there be anything farcical in such a life, the blame is not mine: let it lie at fate's and nature's door.'

The Essays, therefore, are an entertaining soliloquy on every random topic that comes into his head; treating every thing without ceremony, yet with masculine sense. There have been men with deeper insight; but, one would say, never a man with such abundance of thoughts: he is never dull, never insincere, and has the genius to make the reader care for all that he cares for.

The sincerity and marrow of the man reaches to his sentences. I know not any where the book that seems less written. It is the language of conversation transferred to a book. Cut these words, and they would bleed; they are vascular and alive. One has the same pleasure in it that he feels in listening to the necessary speech of men about their work, when any unusual circumstance gives momentary importance to the dialogue. For blacksmiths and teamsters do not trip in their speech; it is a shower of bullets. It is Cambridge men who correct themselves and begin again at every half sentence, and, moreover, will pun, and refine too much, and swerve from the matter to the expression. Montaigne talks with shrewdness, knows the world and books and himself, and uses the positive degree; never shrieks, or protests, or prays: no weakness, no convulsion, no superlative: does not wish to jump out of his skin, or play any antics, or annihilate space or time, but is stout and solid; tastes every moment of the day; likes pain because it makes him feel himself and realize things; as we pinch our-

selves to know that we are awake. He keeps the plain; he rarely mounts or sinks; likes to feel solid ground and the stones underneath. His writing has no enthusiasms, no aspiration; contented, self-respecting and keeping the middle of the road. There is but one exception,—in his love for Socrates. In speaking of him, for once his cheek flushes and his style rises to passion.

Montaigne died of a quinsy, at the age of sixty, in 1592. When he came to die he caused the mass to be celebrated in his chamber. At the age of thirty-three, he had been married. 'But,' he says, 'might I have had my own will, I would not have married Wisdom herself, if she would have had me: but 'tis to much purpose to evade it, the common custom and use of life will have it so. Most of my actions are guided by example, not choice.' In the hour of death, he gave the same weight to custom. *Que sçais je?* What do I know?

This book of Montaigne the world has endorsed by translating it into all tongues and printing seventy-five editions of it in Europe; and that, too, a circulation somewhat chosen, namely among courtiers, soldiers, princes, men of the world and men of wit and generosity.

Shall we say that Montaigne has spoken wisely, and given the right and permanent expression of the human mind, on the conduct of life?

We are natural believers. Truth, or the connection between cause and effect, alone interests us. We are persuaded that a thread runs through all things: all worlds are strung on it, as beads; and men, and events, and life, come to us only because of that

thread: they pass and repass only that we may know the direction and continuity of that line. A book or statement which goes to show that there is no line, but random and chaos, a calamity out of nothing, a prosperity and no account of it, a hero born from a fool, a fool from a hero,—dispirits us. Seen or unseen, we believe the tie exists. Talent makes counterfeit ties; genius finds the real ones. We hearken to the man of science, because we anticipate the sequence in natural phenomena which he uncovers. We love whatever affirms, connects, preserves; and dislike what scatters or pulls down. One man appears whose nature is to all men's eyes conserving and constructive; his presence supposes a well-ordered society, agriculture, trade, large institutions and empire. If these did not exist, they would begin to exist through his endeavors. Therefore he cheers and comforts men, who feel all this in him very readily. The nonconformist and the rebel say all manner of unanswerable things against the existing republic, but discover to our sense no plan of house or state of their own. Therefore, though the town and state and way of living, which our counsellor contemplated, might be a very modest or musty prosperity, yet men rightly go for him, and reject the reformer so long as he comes only with axe and crowbar.

But though we are natural conservers and causationists, and reject a sour, dumpish unbelief, the skeptical class, which Montaigne represents, have reason, and every man, at some time, belongs to it. Every superior mind will pass through this domain of equilibration,—I should rather say, will know how to avail himself of the checks and balances in

nature, as a natural weapon against the exaggeration and formalism of bigots and blockheads.

Skepticism is the attitude assumed by the student in relation to the particulars which society adores, but which he sees to be reverend only in their tendency and spirit. The ground occupied by the skeptic is the vestibule of the temple. Society does not like to have any breath of question blown on the existing order. But the interrogation of custom at all points is an inevitable stage in the growth of every superior mind, and is the evidence of its perception of the flowing power which remains itself in all changes.

The superior mind will find itself equally at odds with the evils of society and with the projects that are offered to relieve them. The wise skeptic is a bad citizen; no conservative, he sees the selfishness of property and the drowsiness of institutions. But neither is he fit to work with any democratic party that ever was constituted; for parties wish every one committed, and he penetrates the popular patriotism. His politics are those of the 'Soul's Errand' of Sir Walter Raleigh; or of Krishna, in the Bhagavat, 'There is none who is worthy of my love or hatred'; whilst he sentences law, physic, divinity, commerce and custom. He is a reformer; yet he is no better member of the philanthropic association. It turns out that he is not the champion of the operative, the pauper, the prisoner, the slave. It stands in his mind that our life in this world is not of quite so easy interpretation as churches and schoolbooks say. He does not wish to take ground against these benevolences, to play the part of devil's attorney, and blazon every doubt and sneer that

darkens the sun for him. But he says, There are doubts.

I mean to use the occasion, and celebrate the calendar-day of our Saint Michel de Montaigne, by counting and describing these doubts or negations. I wish to ferret them out of their holes and sun them a little. We must do with them as the police do with old rogues, who are shown up to the public at the marshal's office. They will never be so formidable when once they have been identified and registered. But I mean honestly by them,—that justice shall be done to their terrors. I shall not take Sunday objections, made up on purpose to be put down. I shall take the worst I can find, whether I can dispose of them or they of me.

I do not press the skepticism of the materialist. I know the quadruped opinion will not prevail. 'Tis of no importance what bats and oxen think. The first dangerous symptom I report is, the levity of intellect; as if it were fatal to earnestness to know much. Knowledge is the knowing that we can not know. The dull pray; the geniuses are light mockers. How respectable is earnestness on every platform! but intellect kills it. Nay, San Carlo, my subtle and admirable friend, one of the most penetrating of men, finds that all direct ascension, even of lofty piety, leads to this ghastly insight and sends back the votary orphaned. My astonishing San Carlo thought the lawgivers and saints infected. They found the ark empty; saw, and would not tell; and tried to choke off their approaching followers, by saying, 'Action, action, my dear fellows, is for you!' Bad as was to me this detection by San Carlo, this frost in July, this blow from a bride, there was still

a worse, namely the cloy or satiety of the saints. In the mount of vision, ere they have yet risen from their knees, they say, 'We discover that this our homage and beatitude is partial and deformed: we must fly for relief to the suspected and reviled Intellect, to the Understanding, the Mephistopheles, to the gymnastics of talent.'

This is hobgoblin the first; and though it has been the subject of much elegy in our nineteenth century, from Byron, Goethe, and other poets of less fame, not to mention many distinguished private observers,—I confess it is not very affecting to my imagination; for it seems to concern the shattering of baby-houses and crockery-shops. What flutters the Church of Rome, or of England, or of Geneva, or of Boston, may yet be very far from touching any principle of faith. I think that the intellect and moral sentiment are unanimous; and that though philosophy extirpates bugbears, yet it supplies the natural checks of vice, and polarity to the soul. I think that the wiser a man is, the more stupendous he finds the natural and moral economy, and lifts himself to a more absolute reliance.

There is the power of moods, each setting at nought all but its own tissue of facts and beliefs. There is the power of complexions, obviously modifying the dispositions and sentiments. The beliefs and unbeliefs appear to be structural; and as soon as each man attains the poise and vivacity which allow the whole machinery to play, he will not need extreme examples, but will rapidly alternate all opinions in his own life. Our life is March weather, savage and serene in one hour. We go forth austere, dedicated, believing in the iron links

of Destiny, and will not turn on our heel to save our life: but a book, or a bust, or only the sound of a name, shoots a spark through the nerves, and we suddenly believe in will: my finger-ring shall be the seal of Solomon; fate is for imbeciles; all is possible to the resolved mind. Presently a new experience gives a new turn to our thoughts: common sense resumes its tyranny; we say, 'Well, the army, after all, is the gate to fame, manners and poetry: and, look you,—on the whole, selfishness plants best, prunes best, makes the best commerce and the best citizen.' Are the opinions of a man on right and wrong, on fate and causation, at the mercy of a broken sleep or an indigestion? Is his belief in God and Duty no deeper than a stomach evidence? And what guaranty for the permanence of his opinions? I like not the French celerity,—a new Church and State once a week. This is the second negation; and I shall let it pass for what it will. As far as it asserts rotation of states of mind, I suppose it suggests its own remedy, namely in the record of larger periods. What is the mean of many states; of all the states? Does the general voice of ages affirm any principle, or is no community of sentiment discoverable in distant times and places? And when it shows the power of self-interest, I accept that as a part of the divine law and must reconcile it with aspiration the best I can.

The word Fate, or Destiny, expresses the sense of mankind, in all ages, that the laws of the world do not always befriend, but often hurt and crush us. Fate, in the shape of *Kinde* or nature, grows over us like grass. We paint Time with a scythe; Love and Fortune, blind; and Destiny, deaf. We have too

little power of resistance against this ferocity which champs us up. What front can we make against these unavoidable, victorious, maleficent forces? What can I do against the influence of Race, in my history? What can I do against hereditary and constitutional habits; against scrofula, lymph, impotence? against climate, against barbarism, in my country? I can reason down or deny every thing, except this perpetual Belly: feed he must and will, and I cannot make him respectable.

But the main resistance which the affirmative impulse finds, and one including all others, is in the doctrine of the Illusionists. There is a painful rumor in circulation that we have been practised upon in all the principal performances of life, and free agency is the emptiest name. We have been sopped and drugged with the air, with food, with woman, with children, with sciences, with events, which leave us exactly where they found us. The mathematics, 'tis complained, leave the mind where they find it: so do all sciences; and so do all events and actions. I find a man who has passed through all the sciences, the churl he was; and, through all the offices, learned, civil and social, can detect the child. We are not the less necessitated to dedicate life to them. In fact, we may come to accept it as the fixed rule and theory of our state of education, that God is a substance, and his method is illusion. The Eastern sages owned the goddess Yoganidra, the great illusory energy of Vishnu, by whom, as utter ignorance, the whole world is beguiled.

Or, shall I state it thus?—The astonishment of

life is the absence of any appearance of reconciliation between the theory and the practice of life. Reason, the prized reality, the Law, is apprehended, now and then, for a serene and profound moment amidst the hubbub of cares and works which have no direct bearing on it;—is then lost for months or years, and again found for an interval, to be lost again. If we compute it in time, we may, in fifty years, have half a dozen reasonable hours. But what are these cares and works the better? A method in the world we do not see, but this parallelism of great and little, which never react on each other, nor discover the smallest tendency to converge. Experiences, fortunes, governings, readings, writings, are nothing to the purpose; as when a man comes into the room it does not appear whether he has been fed on yams or buffalo,—he has contrived to get so much bone and fibre as he wants, out of rice or out of snow. So vast is the disproportion between the sky of law and the pismire of performance under it, that whether he is a man of worth or a sot is not so great a matter as we say. Shall I add, as one juggle of this enchantment, the stunning non-intercourse law which makes coöperation impossible? The young spirit pants to enter society. But all the ways of culture and greatness lead to solitary imprisonment. He has been often baulked. He did not expect a sympathy with his thought from the village, but he went with it to the chosen and intelligent, and found no entertainment for it, but mere misapprehension, distaste and scoffing. Men are strangely mistimed and misapplied; and the excellence of each is an inflamed individualism which separates him more.

There are these, and more than these diseases of thought, which our ordinary teachers do not attempt to remove. Now shall we, because a good nature inclines us to virtue's side, say, There are no doubts,—and lie for the right? Is life to be led in a brave or in a cowardly manner? and is not the satisfaction of the doubts essential to all manliness? Is the name of virtue to be a barrier to that which is virtue? Can you not believe that a man of earnest and burly habit may find small good in tea, essays and catechism, and want a rougher instruction, want men, labor, trade, farming, war, hunger, plenty, love, hatred, doubt and terror to make things plain to him; and has he not a right to insist on being convinced in his own way? When he is convinced, he will be worth the pains.

Belief consists in accepting the affirmations of the soul; unbelief, in denying them. Some minds are incapable of skepticism. The doubts they profess to entertain are rather a civility or accommodation to the common discourse of their company. They may well give themselves leave to speculate, for they are secure of a return. Once admitted to the heaven of thought, they see no relapse into night, but infinite invitation on the other side. Heaven is within heaven, and sky over sky, and they are encompassed with divinities. Others there are to whom the heaven is brass, and it shuts down to the surface of the earth. It is a question of temperament, or of more or less immersion in nature. The last class must needs have a reflex or parasite faith; not a sight of realities, but an instinctive reliance on the seers and believers of realities. The manners and thoughts of believers astonish them and convince

them that these have seen something which is hid from themselves. But their sensual habit would fix the believer to his last position, whilst he as inevitably advances; and presently the unbeliever, for the love of belief, burns the believer.

Great believers are always reckoned infidels, impracticable, fantastic, atheistic, and really men of no account. The spiritualist finds himself driven to express his faith by a series of skepticisms. Charitable souls come with their projects, and ask his coöperation. How can he hesitate? It is the rule of mere comity and courtesy to agree where you can, and to turn your sentence with something auspicious, and not freezing and sinister. But he is forced to say, 'O, these things will be as they must be: what can you do? These particular griefs and crimes are the foliage and fruit of such trees as we see growing. It is vain to complain of the leaf or the berry; cut it off, it will bear another just as bad. You must begin your cure lower down.' The generosities of the day prove an intractable element for him. The people's questions are not his; their methods are not his; and against all the dictates of good nature he is driven to say he has no pleasure in them.

Even the doctrines dear to the hope of man, of the divine Providence and of the immortality of the soul, his neighbors cannot put the statement so that he shall affirm it. But he denies out of more faith, and not less. He denies out of honesty. He had rather stand charged with the imbecility of skepticism, than with untruth. I believe, he says, in the moral design of the universe; it exists hospitably for the weal of souls; but your dogmas seem to me

caricatures: why should I make believe them? Will any say, This is cold and infidel? The wise and magnanimous will not say so. They will exult in his far-sighted good-will that can abandon to the adversary all the ground of tradition and common belief, without losing a jot of strength. It sees to the end of all transgression. George Fox saw that there was 'an ocean of darkness and death; but withal an infinite ocean of light and love which flowed over that of darkness'.

The final solution in which skepticism is lost, is in the moral sentiment, which never forfeits its supremacy. All moods may be safely tried, and their weight allowed to all objections: the moral sentiment as easily outweighs them all, as any one. This is the drop which balances the sea. I play with the miscellany of facts, and take those superficial views which we call skepticism: but I know that they will presently appear to me in that order which makes skepticism impossible. A man of thought must feel the thought that is parent of the universe; that the masses of nature do undulate and flow.

This faith avails to the whole emergency of life and objects. The world is saturated with deity and with law. He is content with just and unjust, with sots and fools, with the triumph of folly and fraud. He can behold with serenity the yawning gulf between the ambition of man and his power of performance, between the demand and supply of power, which makes the tragedy of all souls.

Charles Fourier announced that 'the attractions of man are proportioned to his destinies'; in other words, that every desire predicts its own satisfaction. Yet all experience exhibits the reverse of this;

the incompetency of power is the universal grief of young and ardent minds. They accuse the divine Providence of a certain parsimony. It has shown the heaven and earth to every child and filled him with a desire for the whole; a desire raging, infinite; a hunger, as of space to be filled with planets; a cry of famine, as of devils for souls. Then for the satisfaction,—to each man is administered a single drop, a bead of dew of vital power *per day*,—a cup as large as space, and one drop of the water of life in it. Each man woke in the morning with an appetite that could eat the solar system like a cake; a spirit for action and passion without bounds; he could lay his hand on the morning star; he could try conclusions with gravitation or chemistry; but, on the first motion to prove his strength,—hands, feet, senses, gave way and would not serve him. He was an emperor deserted by his states, and left to whistle by himself, or thrust into a mob of emperors, all whistling: and still the sirens sang, 'The attractions are proportioned to the destinies'. In every house, in the heart of each maiden and of each boy, in the soul of the soaring saint, this chasm is found,—between the largest promise of ideal power, and the shabby experience.

The expansive nature of truth comes to our succor, elastic, not to be surrounded. Man helps himself by larger generalizations. The lesson of life is practically to generalize; to believe what the years and the centuries say, against the hours; to resist the usurpation of particulars; to penetrate to their catholic sense. Things seem to say one thing, and say the reverse. The appearance is immoral; the result is moral. Things seem to tend downward

to justify despondency, to promote rogues, to defeat the just; and by knaves as by martyrs the just cause is carried forward. Although knaves win in every political struggle, although society seems to be delivered over from the hands of one set of criminals into the hands of another set of criminals, as fast as the government is changed, and the march of civilization is a train of felonies, yet, general ends are somehow answered. We see, now, events forced on which seem to retard or retrograde the civility of ages. But the world-spirit is a good swimmer, and storms and waves cannot drown him. He snaps his finger at laws: and so, throughout history, heaven seems to affect low and poor means. Through the years and the centuries, through evil agents, through toys and atoms, a great and beneficent tendency irresistibly streams.

Let a man learn to look for the permanent in the mutable and fleeting; let him learn to bear the disappearance of things he was wont to reverence without losing his reverence; let him learn that he is here, not to work but to be worked upon; and that, though abyss open under abyss, and opinion displace opinion, all are at last contained in the Eternal Cause:—

'If my bark sink, 'tis to another sea.'

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

1819–1891

HAMLET (1868)

GOETHE, in one of the most perfect of his shorter poems, tells us that a poem is like a painted window. Seen from without (and he accordingly justifies the Philistine, who never looks at them otherwise) they seem dingy and confused enough; but enter, and then

> Da ist's auf einmal farbig helle,
> Geschicht' und Zierath glänzt in Schnelle.

With the same feeling he says elsewhere in prose, that 'there is a destructive criticism and a productive. The former is very easy; for one has only to set up in his mind any standard, any model, however narrow' (let us say the Greeks), 'and then boldly assert that the work under review does not match with it, and therefore is good for nothing,—the matter is settled, and one must at once deny its claim. Productive criticism is a great deal more difficult; it asks, What did the author propose to himself? Is what he proposes reasonable and comprehensible? and how far has he succeeded in carrying it out?' It is in applying this latter kind of criticism to Shakespeare that the Germans have set us an example worthy of all commendation. If they have been sometimes over-subtile, they at least had the merit of first looking at his works as wholes, as something that very likely contained an idea, perhaps conveyed a moral, if we could get at it. The

illumination lent us by most of the English commentators reminds us of the candles which guides hold up to show us a picture in a dark place, the smoke of which gradually makes the work of the artist invisible under its repeated layers. Lessing, as might have been expected, opened the first glimpse in the new direction; Goethe followed with his famous exposition of Hamlet; A. W. Schlegel took a more comprehensive view in his Lectures, which Coleridge worked over into English, adding many fine criticisms of his own on single passages; and finally, Gervinus has devoted four volumes to a comment on the plays, full of excellent matter, though pushing the moral exegesis beyond all reasonable bounds.[1] With the help of all these, and especially of the last, I shall apply this theory of criticism to Hamlet, not in the hope of saying anything new, but of bringing something to the support of the thesis, that, if Shakespeare was skilful as a playwright, he was even greater as a dramatist,—that, if his immediate business was to fill the theatre, his higher object was to create something which, by fulfilling the conditions and answering the requirements of modern life, should as truly deserve to be called a work of art as others had deserved it by doing the same thing in former times and under other circumstances. Supposing him to have accepted—consciously or not is of little importance—the new terms of the problem which makes character the pivot of dramatic action, and consequently the key of dramatic unity, how far did he succeed?

[1] I do not mention Ulrici's book, for it seems to me unwieldy and dull—zeal without knowledge.

Before attempting my analysis, I must clear away a little rubbish. Are such anachronisms as those of which Voltaire accuses Shakespeare in Hamlet, such as the introduction of cannon before the invention of gunpowder, and making Christians of the Danes three centuries too soon, of the least bearing aesthetically? I think not; but as they are of a piece with a great many other criticisms upon the great poet, it is worth while to dwell upon them a moment.

The first demand we make upon whatever claims to be a work of art (and we have a right to make it) is that it shall be *in keeping*. Now this propriety is of two kinds, either extrinsic or intrinsic. In the first I should class whatever relates rather to the body than the soul of the work, such as fidelity to the facts of history (wherever that is important), congruity of costume, and the like,—in short, whatever might come under the head of *picturesque* truth, a departure from which would shock too rudely our preconceived associations. I have seen an Indian chief in French boots, and he seemed to me almost tragic; but, put upon the stage in tragedy, he would have been ludicrous. Lichtenberg, writing from London in 1775, tells us that Garrick played Hamlet in a suit of the French fashion, then commonly worn, and that he was blamed for it by some of the critics; but, he says, one hears no such criticism during the play, nor on the way home, nor at supper afterwards, nor indeed till the emotion roused by the great actor has had time to subside. He justifies Garrick, though we should not be able to endure it now. Yet nothing would be gained by trying to make Hamlet's cos-

tume true to the assumed period of the play, for the scene of it is laid in a Denmark that has no dates.

In the second and more important category, I should put, first, coördination of character, that is, a certain variety in harmony of the personages of a drama, as in the attitudes and coloring of the figures in a pictorial composition, so that, while mutually relieving and setting off each other, they shall combine in the total impression; second, that subordinate truth to Nature which makes each character coherent in itself; and, third, such propriety of costume and the like as shall satisfy the superhistoric sense, to which, and to which alone, the higher drama appeals. All these come within the scope of *imaginative* truth. To illustrate my third head by an example. Tieck criticises John Kemble's dressing for Macbeth in a modern Highland costume, as being ungraceful without any countervailing merit of historical exactness. I think a deeper reason for his dissatisfaction might be found in the fact, that this garb, with its purely modern and British army associations, is out of place on Forres Heath, and drags the Weird Sisters down with it from their proper imaginative remoteness in the gloom of the past to the disenchanting glare of the foot-lights. It is not the antiquarian, but the poetic conscience that is wounded. To this, exactness, so far as concerns ideal representation, may not only not be truth, but may even be opposed to it. Anachronisms and the like are in themselves of no account, and become important only when they make a gap too wide for our illusion to cross unconsciously, that is, when they are anacoluthons to the imagina-

tion. The aim of the artist is psychologic, not historic truth. It is comparatively easy for an author to *get up* any period with tolerable minuteness in externals, but readers and audiences find more difficulty in getting them down, though oblivion swallows scores of them at a gulp. The saving truth in such matters is a truth to essential and permanent characteristics. The Ulysses of Shakespeare, like the Ulysses of Dante and Tennyson, more or less harmonizes with our ideal conception of the wary, long-considering, though adventurous son of Laertes, yet Simon Lord Lovat is doubtless nearer the original type. In Hamlet, though there be no Denmark of the ninth century, Shakespeare has suggested the prevailing rudeness of manners quite enough for his purpose. We see it in the single combat of Hamlet's father with the elder Fortinbras, in the vulgar wassail of the king, in the English monarch being expected to hang Rosencrantz and Guildenstern out of hand merely to oblige his cousin of Denmark, in Laertes, sent to Paris to be made a gentleman of, becoming instantly capable of any the most barbarous treachery to glut his vengeance. We cannot fancy Ragnar Lodbrog or Eric the Red matriculating at Wittenberg, but it was essential that Hamlet should be a scholar, and Shakespeare sends him thither without more ado. All through the play we get the notion of a state of society in which a savage nature has disguised itself in the externals of civilization, like a Maori deacon, who has only to strip and he becomes once more a tattooed pagan with his mouth watering for a spare-rib of his pastor. Historically, at the date of Hamlet, the Danes were in the habit of burning their enemies

alive in their houses, with as much of their family about them as might be to make it comfortable. Shakespeare seems purposely to have dissociated his play from history by changing nearly every name in the original legend. The motive of the play—revenge as a religious duty—belongs only to a social state in which the traditions of barbarism are still operative, but, with infallible artistic judgment, Shakespeare has chosen, not untamed Nature, as he found it in history, but the period of transition, a period in which the times are always out of joint, and thus the irresolution which has its root in Hamlet's own character is stimulated by the very incompatibility of that legacy of vengeance he has inherited from the past with the new culture and refinement of which he is the representative. One of the few books which Shakespeare is known to have possessed was Florio's Montaigne, and he might well have transferred the Frenchman's motto, *Que sçais je?* to the front of his tragedy; nor can I help fancying something more than accident in the fact that Hamlet has been a student at Wittenberg, whence those new ideas went forth, of whose results in unsettling men's faith, and consequently disqualifying them for promptness in action, Shakespeare had been not only an eye-witness, but which he must actually have experienced in himself.

One other objection let me touch upon here, especially as it has been urged against Hamlet, and that is the introduction of low characters and comic scenes in tragedy. Even Garrick, who had just assisted at the Stratford Jubilee, where Shakespeare had been pronounced divine, was induced by this

absurd outcry for the proprieties of the tragic stage to omit the grave-diggers' scene from Hamlet. Leaving apart the fact that Shakespeare would not have been the representative poet he is, if he had not given expression to this striking tendency of the Northern races, which shows itself constantly, not only in their literature, but even in their mythology and their architecture, the grave-diggers' scene always impresses me as one of the most pathetic in the whole tragedy. That Shakespeare introduced such scenes and characters with deliberate intention, and with a view to artistic relief and contrast, there can hardly be a doubt. We must take it for granted that a man whose works show everywhere the results of judgment sometimes acted with forethought. I find the springs of the profoundest sorrow and pity in this hardened indifference of the grave-diggers, in their careless discussion as to whether Ophelia's death were by suicide or no, in their singing and jesting at their dreary work.

> A pickaxe and a spade, a spade,
> For — and a shrouding-sheet:
> O, a pit of clay for to be made
> For such a guest is meet!

We know who is to be the guest of this earthen hospitality,—how much beauty, love, and heartbreak are to be covered in that pit of clay. All we remember of Ophelia reacts upon us with tenfold force, and we recoil from our amusement at the ghastly drollery of the two delvers with a shock of horror. That the unconscious Hamlet should stumble on *this* grave of all others, that it should be *here* that he should pause to muse humorously on death and decay,—all this prepares us for the revulsion of

passion in the next scene, and for the frantic confession,—

> I loved Ophelia; forty thousand brothers
> Could not with all *their* quantity of love
> Make up my sum!

And it is only here that such an asseveration would be true even to the feeling of the moment; for it is plain from all we know of Hamlet that he could not so have loved Ophelia, that he was incapable of the self-abandonment of a true passion, that he would have analyzed this emotion as he does all others, would have peeped and botanized upon it till it became to him a mere matter of scientific interest. All this force of contrast and this horror of surprise were necessary so to intensify his remorseful regret that he should believe himself for once in earnest. The speech of the King, 'O, he is mad, Laertes', recalls him to himself, and he at once begins to rave:—

> Zounds! show me what thou'lt do!
> Woul't weep? woul't fight? woul't fast? woul't tear
> thyself?
> Woul't drink up eysil? eat a crocodile?

It is easy to see that the whole plot hinges upon the character of Hamlet, that Shakespeare's conception of this was the ovum out of which the whole organism was hatched. And here let me remark, that there is a kind of genealogical necessity in the character,—a thing not altogether strange to the attentive reader of Shakespeare. Hamlet seems the natural result of the mixture of father and mother in his temperament, the resolution and persistence of the one, like sound timber wormholed and made

shaky, as it were, by the other's infirmity of will and discontinuity of purpose. In natures so imperfectly mixed it is not uncommon to find vehemence of intention the prelude and counterpoise of weak performance, the conscious nature striving to keep up its self-respect by a triumph in words all the more resolute that it feels assured beforehand of inevitable defeat in action. As in such slipshod housekeeping men are their own largest creditors, they find it easy to stave off utter bankruptcy of conscience by taking up one unpaid promise with another larger, and at heavier interest, till such self-swindling becomes habitual and by degrees almost painless. How did Coleridge discount his own notes of this kind with less and less specie as the figures lengthened on the paper! As with Hamlet, so it is with Ophelia and Laertes. The father's feebleness comes up again in the wasting heartbreak and gentle lunacy of the daughter, while the son shows it in a rashness of impulse and act, a kind of crankiness, of whose essential feebleness we are all the more sensible as contrasted with a nature so steady on its keel, and drawing so much water, as that of Horatio,—the foil at once, in different ways, both to him and Hamlet. It was natural, also, that the daughter of self-conceited old Polonius should have her softness stiffened with a fibre of obstinacy; for there are two kinds of weakness, that which breaks, and that which bends. Ophelia's is of the former kind; Hero is her counterpart, giving way before calamity, and rising again so soon as the pressure is removed.

I find two passages in Dante that contain the exactest possible definition of that habit or quality

of Hamlet's mind which justifies the tragic turn of the play, and renders it natural and unavoidable from the beginning. The first is from the second canto of the *Inferno*:—

E quale è quei che disvuol ciò che volle,
E per nuovi pensier cangia proposta,
Sì che dal cominciar tutto si tolle;
Tal mi fec' io in quella oscura costa:
Perchè pensando consumai la impresa
Che fu nel cominciar cotanto tosta.

And like the man who unwills what he willed,
And for new thoughts doth change his first intent,
So that he cannot anywhere begin,
Such became I upon that slope obscure,
Because with thinking I consumed resolve,
That was so ready at the setting out.

Again, in the fifth of the *Purgatorio*:—

Chè sempre l'uomo in cui pensier rampolla
Sopra pensier, da sè dilunga il segno,
Perchè la foga l'un dell'altro insolla.

For always he in whom one thought buds forth
Out of another farther puts the goal,
For each has only force to mar the other.

Dante was a profound metaphysician, and as in the first passage he describes and defines a certain quality of mind, so in the other he tells us its result in the character and life, namely, indecision and failure,—the goal *farther* off at the end than at the beginning. It is remarkable how close a resemblance of thought, and even of expression, there is between the former of these quotations and a part of Hamlet's famous soliloquy:—

Thus conscience [i.e. consciousness] doth make cowards
of us all:
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action!

It is an inherent peculiarity of a mind like Hamlet's that it should be conscious of its own defect. Men of his type are forever analyzing their own emotions and motives. They cannot do anything, because they always see two ways of doing it. They cannot determine on any course of action, because they are always, as it were, standing at the cross-roads, and see too well the disadvantages of every one of them. It is not that they are incapable of resolve, but somehow the band between the motive power and the operative faculties is relaxed and loose. The engine works, but the machinery it should drive stands still. The imagination is so much in overplus, that thinking a thing becomes better than doing it, and thought with its easy perfection, capable of everything because it can accomplish everything with ideal means, is vastly more attractive and satisfactory than deed, which must be wrought at best with imperfect instruments, and always falls short of the conception that went before it. 'If to do,' says Portia in the *Merchant of Venice*,—'if to do were as easy as to know what 't were good to do, chapels had been churches, and poor men's cottages princes' palaces.' Hamlet knows only too well what 't were good to do, but he palters with everything in a double sense: he sees the grain of good there is in evil, and

the grain of evil there is in good, as they exist in the world, and, finding that he can make those feather-weighted accidents balance each other, infers that there is little to choose between the essences themselves. He is of Montaigne's mind, and says expressly that 'there is nothing good or ill, but thinking makes it so'. He dwells so exclusively in the world of ideas that the world of facts seems trifling; nothing is worth the while; and he has been so long objectless and purposeless, so far as actual life is concerned, that, when at last an object and an aim are forced upon him, he cannot deal with them, and gropes about vainly for a motive outside of himself that shall marshal his thoughts for him and guide his faculties into the path of action. He is the victim not so much of feebleness of will as of an intellectual indifference that hinders the will from working long in any one direction. He wishes to will, but never wills. His continual iteration of resolve shows that he has no resolution. He is capable of passionate energy where the occasion presents itself suddenly from without, because nothing is so irritable as conscious irresolution with a duty to perform. But of deliberate energy he is not capable; for there the impulse must come from within, and the blade of his analysis is so subtile that it can divide the finest hair of motive 'twixt north and northwest side, leaving him desperate to choose between them. The very consciousness of his defect is an insuperable bar to his repairing it; for the unity of purpose, which infuses every fibre of the character with will available whenever wanted, is impossible where the mind can never rest till it has resolved that unity into its component

elements, and satisfied itself which on the whole is of greater value. A critical instinct so insatiable that it must turn upon itself, for lack of something else to hew and hack, becomes incapable at last of originating anything except indecision. It becomes infallible in what *not* to do. How easily he might have accomplished his task is shown by the conduct of Laertes. When *he* has a death to avenge, he raises a mob, breaks into the palace, bullies the king, and proves how weak the usurper really was.

The world is the victim of splendid parts, and is slow to accept a rounded whole, because that is something which is long in completing, still longer in demonstrating its completion. We like to be surprised into admiration, and not logically convinced that we ought to admire. We are willing to be delighted with success, though we are somewhat indifferent to the homely qualities which insure it. Our thought is so filled with the rocket's burst of momentary splendor so far above us, that we forget the poor stick, useful and unseen, that made its climbing possible. One of these homely qualities is continuity of character, and it escapes present applause because it tells chiefly in the long run, in results. With his usual tact, Shakespeare has brought in such a character as a contrast and foil to Hamlet. Horatio is the only complete *man* in the play,—solid, well-knit, and true; a noble, quiet nature, with that highest of all qualities, judgment, always sane and prompt; who never drags his anchors for any wind of opinion or fortune, but grips all the closer to the reality of things. He seems one of those calm, undemonstrative men whom we love and admire without asking to know why,

crediting them with the capacity of great things, without any test of actual achievement, because we feel that their manhood is a constant quality, and no mere accident of circumstance and opportunity. Such men are always sure of the presence of their highest self on demand. Hamlet is continually drawing bills on the future, secured by his promise of himself to himself, which he can never redeem. His own somewhat feminine nature recognizes its complement in Horatio, and clings to it instinctively, as naturally as Horatio is attracted by that fatal gift of imagination, the absence of which makes the strength of his own character, as its overplus does the weakness of Hamlet's. It is a happy marriage of two minds drawn together by the charm of unlikeness. Hamlet feels in Horatio the solid steadiness which he misses in himself; Horatio in Hamlet that need of service and sustainment to render which gives him a consciousness of his own value. Hamlet fills the place of a woman to Horatio, revealing him to himself not only in what he says, but by a constant claim upon his strength of nature; and there is great psychological truth in making suicide the first impulse of this quiet, undemonstrative man, after Hamlet's death, as if the very reason for his being were taken away with his friend's need of him. In his grief, he for the first and only time speaks of himself, is first made conscious of himself by his loss. If this manly reserve of Horatio be true to Nature, not less so are the communicativeness of Hamlet and his tendency to soliloquize. If self-consciousness be alien to the one, it is just as truly the happiness of the other. Like a musician distrustful of himself, he is forever tuning his instru-

ment, first overstraining this cord a little, and then that, but unable to bring them into unison, or to profit by it if he could.

I do not believe that Horatio ever thought he 'was not a pipe for Fortune's finger to play what stop she please', till Hamlet told him so. That was Fortune's affair, not his; let her try it, if she liked. He is unconscious of his own peculiar qualities, as men of decision commonly are, or they would not be men of decision. When there is a thing to be done, they go straight at it, and for the time there is nothing for them in the whole universe but themselves and their object. Hamlet, on the other hand, is always studying himself. This world and the other, too, are always present to his mind, and there in the corner is the little black kobold of a doubt making mouths at him. He breaks down the bridges before him, not behind him, as a man of action would do; but there is something more than this. He is an ingrained sceptic; though his is the scepticism, not of reason, but of feeling, whose root is want of faith in himself. In him it is passive, a malady rather than a function of the mind. We might call him insincere: not that he was in any sense a hypocrite, but only that he never was and never could be in earnest. Never could be, because no man without intense faith in something ever can. Even if he only believed in himself, that were better than nothing; for it will carry a man a great way in the outward successes of life, nay, will even sometimes give him the Archimedean fulcrum for moving the world. But Hamlet doubts everything. He doubts the immortality of the soul, just after seeing his father's spirit, and hearing from its mouth the secrets of the

other world. He doubts Horatio even, and swears him to secrecy on the cross of his sword, though probably he himself has no assured belief in the sacredness of the symbol. He doubts Ophelia, and asks her, 'Are you honest?' He doubts the ghost, after he has had a little time to think about it, and so gets up the play to test the guilt of the king. And how coherent the whole character is! With what perfect tact and judgment Shakespeare, in the advice to the players, makes him an exquisite critic! For just here that part of his character which would be weak in dealing with affairs is strong. A wise scepticism is the first attribute of a good critic. He must not believe that the fire-insurance offices will raise their rates of premium on the Charles, because the new volume of poems is printing at Riverside or the University Press. He must not believe so profoundly in the ancients as to think it wholly out of the question that the world has still vigor enough in its loins to beget some one who will one of these days be as good an ancient as any of them.

Another striking quality in Hamlet's nature is his perpetual inclination to irony. I think this has been generally passed over too lightly, as if it were something external and accidental, rather assumed as a mask than part of the real nature of the man. It seems to me to go deeper, to be something innate, and not merely factitious. It is nothing like the grave irony of Socrates, which was the weapon of a man thoroughly in earnest,—the *boomerang* of argument, which one throws in the opposite direction of what he means to hit, and which seems to be flying away from the adversary, who will presently

find himself knocked down by it. It is not like the irony of Timon, which is but the wilful refraction of a clear mind twisting awry whatever enters it,—or of Iago, which is the slime that a nature essentially evil loves to trail over all beauty and goodness to taint them with distrust: it is the half-jest, half-earnest of an inactive temperament that has not quite made up its mind whether life is a reality or no, whether men were not made in jest, and which amuses itself equally with finding a deep meaning in trivial things and a trifling one in the profoundest mysteries of being, because the want of earnestness in its own essence infects everything else with its own indifference. If there be now and then an unmannerly rudeness and bitterness in it, as in the scenes with Polonius and Osrick, we must remember that Hamlet was just in the condition which spurs men to sallies of this kind: dissatisfied, at one neither with the world nor with himself, and accordingly casting about for something out of himself to vent his spleen upon. But even in these passages there is no hint of earnestness, of any purpose beyond the moment; they are mere cat's-paws of vexation, and not the deep-raking ground-swell of passion, as we see it in the sarcasm of Lear.

The question of Hamlet's madness has been much discussed and variously decided. High medical authority has pronounced, as usual, on both sides of the question. But the induction has been drawn from too narrow premises, being based on a mere diagnosis of the *case*, and not on an appreciation of the character in its completeness. We have a case of pretended madness in the Edgar of *King Lear*; and it is certainly true that that is a charcoal sketch,

coarsely outlined, compared with the delicate drawing, the lights, shades, and half-tints of the portraiture in Hamlet. But does this tend to prove that the madness of the latter, because truer to the recorded observation of experts, is real, and meant to be real, as the other to be fictitious? Not in the least, as it appears to me. Hamlet, among all the characters of Shakespeare, is the most eminently a metaphysician and psychologist. He is a close observer, continually analyzing his own nature and that of others, letting fall his little drops of acid irony on all who come near him, to make them show what they are made of. Even Ophelia is not too sacred, Osrick not too contemptible for experiment. If such a man assumed madness, he would play his part perfectly. If Shakespeare himself, without going mad, could so observe and remember all the abnormal symptoms as to be able to reproduce them in Hamlet, why should it be beyond the power of Hamlet to reproduce them in himself? If you deprive Hamlet of reason, there is no truly tragic motive left. He would be a fit subject for Bedlam, but not for the stage. We might have pathology enough, but no pathos. Ajax first becomes tragic when he recovers his wits. If Hamlet is irresponsible, the whole play is a chaos. That he is not so might be proved by evidence enough, were it not labor thrown away.

This feigned madness of Hamlet's is one of the few points in which Shakespeare has kept close to the old story on which he founded his play; and as he never decided without deliberation, so he never acted without unerring judgment. Hamlet *drifts* through the whole tragedy. He never keeps on one

tack long enough to get steerage-way, even if, in a nature like his, with those electric streamers of whim and fancy forever wavering across the vault of his brain, the needle of judgment would point in one direction long enough to strike a course by. The scheme of simulated insanity is precisely the one he would have been likely to hit upon, because it enabled him to follow his own bent, and to drift with an apparent purpose, postponing decisive action by the very means he adopts to arrive at its accomplishment, and satisfying himself with the show of doing something that he may escape so much the longer the dreaded necessity of really doing anything at all. It enables him to *play* with life and duty, instead of taking them by the rougher side, where alone any firm grip is possible,—to feel that he is on the way towards accomplishing somewhat, when he is really paltering with his own irresolution. Nothing, I think, could be more finely imagined than this. Voltaire complains that he goes mad without any sufficient object or result. Perfectly true, and precisely what was most natural for him to do, and, accordingly, precisely what Shakespeare meant that he should do. It was delightful to him to indulge his imagination and humor, to prove his capacity for something by playing a part: the one thing he could not do was to bring himself to *act*, unless when surprised by a sudden impulse of suspicion,—as where he kills Polonius, and there he could not see his victim. He discourses admirably of suicide, but does not kill himself; he talks daggers, but uses none. He puts by his chance to kill the king with the excuse that he will not do it while he is praying, lest his soul be

saved thereby, though it be more than doubtful whether he believed himself that, if there were a soul to be saved, it could be saved by that expedient. He allows himself to be packed off to England, without any motive except that it would for the time take him farther from a present duty, the more disagreeable to a nature like his because it *was* present, and not a mere matter for speculative consideration. When Goethe made his famous comparison of the acorn planted in a vase which it bursts with its growth, and says that in like manner Hamlet is a nature which breaks down under the weight of a duty too great for it to bear, he seems to have considered the character too much from one side. Had Hamlet actually killed himself to escape his too onerous commission, Goethe's conception of him would have been satisfactory enough. But Hamlet was hardly a sentimentalist, like Werther; on the contrary, he saw things only too clearly in the dry north-light of the intellect. It is chance that at last brings him to his end. It would appear rather that Shakespeare intended to show us an imaginative temperament brought face to face with actualities, into any clear relation of sympathy with which it cannot bring itself. The very means that Shakespeare makes use of to lay upon him the obligation of acting—the ghost—really seems to make it all the harder for him to act; for the spectre but gives an additional excitement to his imagination and a fresh topic for his scepticism.

I shall not attempt to evolve any high moral significance from the play, even if I thought it possible; for that would be aside from the present purpose. The scope of the higher drama is to

represent life, not every-day life, it is true, but life lifted above the plane of bread-and-butter associations, by nobler reaches of language, by the influence at once inspiring and modulating of verse, by an intenser play of passion condensing that misty mixture of feeling and reflection which makes the ordinary atmosphere of existence into flashes of thought and phrase whose brief, but terrible, illumination prints the outworn landscape of every-day upon our brains, with its little motives and mean results, in lines of tell-tale fire. The moral office of tragedy is to show us our own weaknesses idealized in grander figures and more awful results,—to teach us that what we pardon in ourselves as venial faults, if they seem to have but slight influence on our immediate fortunes, have arms as long as those of kings, and reach forward to the catastrophe of our lives; that they are dry-rotting the very fibre of will and conscience, so that, if we should be brought to the test of a great temptation or a stringent emergency, we must be involved in a ruin as sudden and complete as that we shudder at in the unreal scene of the theatre. But the primary *object* of a tragedy is not to inculcate a formal moral. Representing life, it teaches, like life, by indirection, by those nods and winks that are thrown away on us blind horses in such profusion. We may learn, to be sure, plenty of lessons from Shakespeare. We are not likely to have kingdoms to divide, crowns foretold us by weird sisters, a father's death to avenge, or to kill our wives from jealousy; but Lear may teach us to draw the line more clearly between a wise generosity and a loose-handed weakness of giving; Macbeth, how one sin involves another, and

forever another, by a fatal parthenogenesis, and that the key which unlocks forbidden doors to our will or passion leaves a stain on the hand, that may not be so dark as blood, but that will not out; Hamlet, that all the noblest gifts of person, temperament, and mind slip like sand through the grasp of an infirm purpose; Othello, that the perpetual silt of some one weakness, the eddies of a suspicious temper depositing their one impalpable layer after another, may build up a shoal on which an heroic life and an otherwise magnanimous nature may bilge and go to pieces. All this we may learn, and much more, and Shakespeare was no doubt well aware of all this and more; but I do not believe that he wrote his plays with any such didactic purpose. He knew human nature too well not to know that one thorn of experience is worth a whole wilderness of warning,—that, where one man shapes his life by precept and example, there are a thousand who have it shaped for them by impulse and by circumstances. He did not mean his great tragedies for scarecrows, as if the nailing of one hawk to the barn-door would prevent the next from coming down souse into the hen-yard. No, it is not the poor bleaching victim hung up to moult its draggled feathers in the rain that he wishes to show us. He loves the hawk-nature as well as the hen-nature; and if he is unequalled in anything, it is in that sunny breadth of view, that impregnability of reason, that looks down on all ranks and conditions of men, all fortune and misfortune, with the equal eye of the pure artist.

Whether I have fancied anything into Hamlet which the author never dreamed of putting there

I do not greatly concern myself to inquire. Poets are always entitled to a royalty on whatever we find in their works; for these fine creations as truly build themselves up in the brain as they are built up with deliberate forethought. Praise art as we will, that which the artist did not mean to put into his work, but which found itself there by some generous process of Nature of which he was as unaware as the blue river is of its rhyme with the blue sky, has somewhat in it that snatches us into sympathy with higher things than those which come by plot and observation. Goethe wrote his *Faust* in its earliest form without a thought of the deeper meaning which the exposition of an age of criticism was to find in it: without foremeaning it, he had impersonated in Mephistopheles the genius of his century. Shall this subtract from the debt we owe him? Not at all. If originality were conscious of itself, it would have lost its right to be original. I believe that Shakespeare intended to impersonate in Hamlet not a mere metaphysical entity, but a man of flesh and blood: yet it is certainly curious how prophetically typical the character is of that introversion of mind which is so constant a phenomenon of these latter days, of that over-consciousness which wastes itself in analyzing the motives of action instead of acting.

The old painters had a rule, that all compositions should be pyramidal in form,—a central figure, from which the others slope gradually away on the two sides. Shakespeare probably had never heard of this rule, and, if he had, would not have been likely to respect it more than he has the so-called classical unities of time and place. But he under-

stood perfectly the artistic advantages of gradation, contrast, and relief. Taking Hamlet as the key-note, we find in him weakness of character, which, on the one hand, is contrasted with the feebleness that springs from overweening conceit in Polonius and with frailty of temperament in Ophelia, while, on the other hand, it is brought into fuller relief by the steady force of Horatio and the impulsive violence of Laertes, who is resolute from thoughtlessness, just as Hamlet is irresolute from overplus of thought.

If we must draw a moral from Hamlet, it would seem to be, that Will is Fate, and that, Will once abdicating, the inevitable successor in the regency is Chance. Had Hamlet acted, instead of musing how good it would be to act, the king might have been the only victim. As it is, all the main actors in the story are the fortuitous sacrifice of his irresolution. We see how a single great vice of character at last draws to itself as allies and confederates all other weaknesses of the man, as in civil wars the timid and the selfish wait to throw themselves upon the stronger side.

In Life's small things be resolute and great
To keep thy muscles trained: know'st thou when Fate
Thy measure takes? or when she'll say to thee,
'I find thee worthy, do this thing for me'?

I have said that it was doubtful if Shakespeare had any conscious moral intention in his writings. I meant only that he was purely and primarily poet. And while he was an English poet in a sense that is true of no other, his method was thoroughly Greek, yet with this remarkable difference,—that, while

the Greek dramatists took purely national themes and gave them a universal interest by their mode of treatment, he took what may be called cosmopolitan traditions, legends of human nature, and nationalized them by the infusion of his perfectly Anglican breadth of character and solidity of understanding. Wonderful as his imagination and fancy are, his perspicacity and artistic discretion are more so. This country tradesman's son, coming up to London, could set high-bred wits, like Beaumont, uncopiable lessons in drawing gentlemen such as are seen nowhere else but on the canvas of Titian; he could take Ulysses away from Homer and expand the shrewd and crafty islander into a statesman whose words are the pith of history. But what makes him yet more exceptional was his utterly unimpeachable judgment, and that poise of character which enabled him to be at once the greatest of poets and so unnoticeable a good citizen as to leave no incidents for biography. His material was never far-sought; (it is still disputed whether the fullest head of which we have record were cultivated beyond the range of grammar-school precedent!) but he used it with a poetic instinct which we cannot parallel, identified himself with it, yet remained always its born and questionless master. He finds the Clown and Fool upon the stage,—he makes them the tools of his pleasantry, his satire, his wisdom, and even his pathos; he finds a fading rustic superstition, and shapes out of it ideal Pucks, Titanias, and Ariels, in whose existence statesmen and scholars believe forever. Always poet, he subjects all to the ends of his art, and gives in Hamlet the churchyard ghost, but with the cothurnus on,—

the messenger of God's revenge against murder; always philosopher, he traces in Macbeth the metaphysics of apparitions, painting the shadowy Banquo only on the o'erwrought brain of the murderer, and staining the hand of his wife-accomplice (because she was the more refined and higher nature) with the disgustful blood-spot that is not there. I say he had no moral intention, for the reason, that, as artist, it was not his to deal with the realities, but only with the shows of things; yet, with a temperament so just, an insight so inevitable as his, it was impossible that the moral reality, which underlies the *mirage* of the poet's vision, should not always be suggested. His humor and satire are never of the destructive kind; what he does in that way is suggestive only,—not breaking bubbles with Thor's hammer, but puffing them away with the breath of a Clown, or shivering them with the light laugh of a genial cynic. Men go about to prove the existence of a God! Was it a bit of phosphorus, that brain whose creations are so real, that, mixing with them, we feel as if we ourselves were but fleeting magic-lantern shadows?

But higher even than the genius I rate the character of this unique man, and the grand impersonality of what he wrote. What has he told us of himself? In our self-exploiting nineteenth century, with its melancholy liver-complaint, how serene and high he seems! If he had sorrows, he has made them the woof of everlasting consolation to his kind; and if, as poets are wont to whine, the outward world was cold to him, its biting air did but trace itself in loveliest frost-work of fancy on the many windows of that self-centred and cheerful soul.

WORDSWORTH (1875)

A GENERATION has now passed away since Wordsworth was laid with the family in the churchyard at Grasmere.[1] Perhaps it is hardly yet time to take a perfectly impartial measure of his value as a poet. To do this is especially hard for those who are old enough to remember the last shot which the foe was sullenly firing in that long war of critics which began when he published his manifesto as Pretender, and which came to a pause rather than to an end when they flung up their caps with the rest at his final coronation. Something of the intensity of the *odium theologicum* (if indeed the *aestheticum* be not in these days the more bitter of the two) entered into the conflict. The Wordsworthians were a sect, who, if they had the enthusiasm, had also not a little of the exclusiveness and partiality to which sects are liable. The verses of the master had for them the virtue of religious canticles stimulant of zeal and not amenable to the ordinary tests of cold-blooded criticism. Like the hymns of the Huguenots and Covenanters, they were songs of battle no less than of worship, and the combined ardors of conviction and conflict lent them a fire that was not naturally their own. As we read them now, that virtue of the moment is gone out of them, and what-

[1] 'I pay many little visits to the family in the churchyard at Grasmere', writes James Dixon (an old servant of Wordsworth) to Crabb Robinson, with a simple, one might almost say canine pathos, thirteen years after his wife's death. Wordsworth was always considerate and kind with his servants, Robinson tells us.

ever of Dr. Wattsiness there is gives us a slight shock of disenchantment. It is something like the difference between the 'Marseillaise' sung by armed propagandists on the edge of battle, or by Brissotins in the tumbrel, and the words of it read coolly in the closet, or recited with the factitious frenzy of Thérèse. It was natural in the early days of Wordsworth's career to dwell most fondly on those profounder qualities to appreciate which settled in some sort the measure of a man's right to judge of poetry at all. But now we must admit the shortcomings, the failures, the defects, as no less essential elements informing a sound judgment as to whether the seer and artist were so united in him as to justify the claim first put in by himself and afterwards maintained by his sect to a place beside the few great poets who exalt men's minds, and give a right direction and safe outlet to their passion through the imagination, while insensibly helping them toward balance of character and serenity of judgment by stimulating their sense of proportion, form, and the nice adjustment of means to ends. In none of our poets has the constant propulsion of an unbending will, and the concentration of exclusive, if I must not say somewhat narrow, sympathies done so much to make the original endowment of Nature effective, and in none accordingly does the biography throw so much light on the works, or enter so largely into their composition as an element whether of power or of weakness. Wordsworth never saw, and I think never wished to see, beyond the limits of his own consciousness and experience. He early conceived himself to be, and through life was confirmed by circumstances in the

faith that he was, a 'dedicated spirit',[1] a state of mind likely to further an intense but at the same time one-sided development of the intellectual powers. The solitude in which the greater part of his mature life was passed, while it doubtless ministered to the passionate intensity of his musings upon man and nature, was, it may be suspected, harmful to him as an artist, by depriving him of any standard of proportion outside himself by which to test the comparative value of his thoughts, and by rendering him more and more incapable of that urbanity of mind which could be gained only by commerce with men more nearly on his own level, and which gives tone without lessening individuality. Wordsworth never quite saw the distinction between the eccentric and the original. For what we call originality seems not so much anything peculiar, much less anything odd, but that quality in a man which touches human nature at most points of its circumference, which reinvigorates the consciousness of our own powers by recalling and confirming our own unvalued sensations and perceptions, gives classic shape to our own amorphous imaginings, and adequate utterance to our own stammering conceptions or emotions. The poet's office is to be a Voice, not of one crying in the wilderness to a knot of already magnetized acolytes, but singing amid

[1] In the *Prelude* he attributes this consecration to a sunrise seen (during a college vacation) as he walked homeward from some village festival where he had danced all night:

> My heart was full; I made no vows, but vows
> Were then made for me; bond unknown to me
> Was given that I should be, else sinning greatly,
> A dedicated Spirit. (Bk. IV.)

the throng of men, and lifting their common aspirations and sympathies (so first clearly revealed to themselves) on the wings of his song to a purer ether and a wider reach of view. We cannot, if we would, read the poetry of Wordsworth as mere poetry; at every other page we find ourselves entangled in a problem of aesthetics. The world-old question of matter and form, of whether nectar *is* of precisely the same flavor when served to us from a Grecian chalice or from any jug of ruder pottery, comes up for decision anew. The Teutonic nature has always shown a sturdy preference of the solid bone with a marrow of nutritious moral to any shadow of the same on the flowing mirror of sense. Wordsworth never lets us long forget the deeply rooted stock from which he sprang—*vien ben dà lui*.***

The true rank of Wordsworth among poets is, perhaps, not even yet to be fairly estimated, so hard is it to escape into the quiet hall of judgment uninflamed by the tumult of partisanship which beset the doors.

Coming to manhood, predetermined to be a great poet, at a time when the artificial school of poetry was enthroned with all the authority of long succession and undisputed legitimacy, it was almost inevitable that Wordsworth, who, both by nature and judgment, was a rebel against the existing order, should become a partisan. Unfortunately, he became not only the partisan of a system, but of William Wordsworth as its representative. Right in general principle, he thus necessarily became wrong in particulars. Justly convinced that greatness only achieves its ends by implicitly obeying its own instincts, he perhaps reduced the following

his instincts too much to a system, mistook his own resentments for the promptings of his natural genius, and, compelling principle to the measure of his own temperament or even of the controversial exigency of the moment, fell sometimes into the error of making naturalness itself artificial. If a poet resolve to be original, it will end commonly in his being merely peculiar.

Wordsworth himself departed more and more in practice, as he grew older, from the theories which he had laid down in his prefaces; but those theories undoubtedly had a great effect in retarding the growth of his fame. He had carefully constructed a pair of spectacles through which his earlier poems were to be studied, and the public insisted on looking through them at his mature works, and were consequently unable to see fairly what required a different focus. He forced his readers to come to his poetry with a certain amount of conscious preparation, and thus gave them beforehand the impression of something like mechanical artifice, and deprived them of the contented repose of implicit faith. To the child a watch seems to be a living creature; but Wordsworth would not let his readers be children, and did injustice to himself by giving them an uneasy doubt whether creations which really throbbed with the very heart's-blood of genius, and were alive with nature's life of life, were not contrivances of wheels and springs. A naturalness which we are told to expect has lost the crowning grace of nature. The men who walked in Cornelius Agrippa's visionary gardens had probably no more pleasurable emotion than that of a shallow wonder, or an equally shallow self-satisfaction in thinking they had hit

upon the secret of the thaumaturgy; but to a tree that has grown as God willed we come without a theory and with no botanical predilections, enjoying it simply and thankfully; or the Imagination recreates for us its past summers and winters, the birds that have nested and sung in it, the sheep that have clustered in its shade, the winds that have visited it, the cloudbergs that have drifted over it, and the snows that have ermined it in winter. The Imagination is a faculty that flouts at foreordination, and Wordsworth seemed to do all he could to cheat his readers of her company by laying out paths with a peremptory *Do not step off the gravel!* at the opening of each, and preparing pitfalls for every conceivable emotion, with guide-boards to tell each when and where it must be caught.

But if these things stood in the way of immediate appreciation, he had another theory which interferes most seriously with the total and permanent effect of his poems. He was theoretically determined not only to be a philosophic poet, but to be a *great* philosophic poet, and to this end he must produce an epic. Leaving aside the question whether the epic be obsolete or not, it may be doubted whether the history of a single man's mind is universal enough in its interest to furnish all the requirements of the epic machinery, and it may be more than doubted whether a poet's philosophy be ordinary metaphysics, divisible into chapter and section. It is rather something which is more energetic in a word than in a whole treatise, and our hearts unclose themselves instinctively at its simple *Open sesame!* while they would stand firm against the reading of the whole body of philosophy.

In point of fact, the one element of greatness which 'The Excursion' possesses indisputably is heaviness. It is only the episodes that are universally read, and the effect of these is diluted by the connecting and accompanying lectures on metaphysics. Wordsworth had his epic mould to fill, and, like Benvenuto Cellini in casting his Perseus, was forced to throw in everything, debasing the metal lest it should run short. Separated from the rest, the episodes are perfect poems in their kind, and without example in the language.

Wordsworth, like most solitary men of strong minds, was a good critic of the substance of poetry, but somewhat niggardly in the allowance he made for those subsidiary qualities which make it the charmer of leisure and the employment of minds without definite object. It may be doubted, indeed, whether he set much store by any contemporary writing but his own, and whether he did not look upon poetry too exclusively as an exercise rather of the intellect than as a nepenthe of the imagination.[1] He says of himself, speaking of his youth:—

> In fine,
> I was a better judge of thoughts than words,
> Misled in estimating words, not only
> By common inexperience of youth,
> But by the trade in classic niceties,
> The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase
> From languages that want the living voice
> To carry meaning to the natural heart;
> To tell us what is passion, what is truth,
> What reason, what simplicity and sense.[2]

[1] According to Landor, he pronounced all Scott's poetry to be 'not worth five shillings'.

[2] *Prelude*, bk. IV.

Though he here speaks in the preterite tense, this was always true of him, and his thought seems often to lean upon a word too weak to bear its weight. No reader of adequate insight can help regretting that he did not earlier give himself to 'the trade of classic niceties'. It was precisely this which gives to the blank verse of Landor the severe dignity and reserved force which alone among later poets recall the tune of Milton, and to which Wordsworth never attained. Indeed, Wordsworth's blank verse (though the passion be profounder) is always essentially that of Cowper. They were alike also in their love of outward nature and of simple things. The main difference between them is one of scenery rather than of sentiment, between the lifelong familiar of the mountains and the dweller on the plain.

It cannot be denied that in Wordsworth the very highest powers of the poetic mind were associated with a certain tendency to the diffuse and commonplace. It is in the understanding (always prosaic) that the great golden veins of his imagination are embedded.[1] He wrote too much to write always well; for it is not a great Xerxes-army of words, but a compact Greek ten thousand, that march safely

[1] This was instinctively felt, even by his admirers. Miss Martineau said to Crabb Robinson in 1839, speaking of Wordsworth's conversation: 'Sometimes he is annoying from the pertinacity with which he dwells on trifles; at other times he flows on in the utmost grandeur, leaving a strong impression of inspiration'. Robinson tells us that he read *Resolution and Independence* to a lady who was affected by it even to tears, and then said, 'I have not heard anything for years that so much delighted me; but, *after all, it is not poetry*'.

down to posterity. He set tasks to his divine faculty, which is much the same as trying to make Jove's eagle do the service of a clucking hen. Throughout 'The Prelude' and 'The Excursion' he seems striving to bind the wizard Imagination with the sand-ropes of dry disquisition, and to have forgotten the potent spell-word which would make the particles cohere. There is an arenaceous quality in the style which makes progress wearisome. Yet with what splendors as of mountain sunsets are we rewarded! what golden rounds of verse do we not see stretching heavenward with angels ascending and descending! what haunting harmonies hover around us deep and eternal like the undying barytone of the sea! and if we are compelled to fare through sands and desert wildernesses, how often do we not hear airy shapes that syllable our names with a startling personal appeal to our highest consciousness and our noblest aspiration, such as we wait for in vain in any other poet! Landor, in a letter to Miss Holford, says admirably of him, 'Common minds alone can be ignorant what breadth of philosophy, what energy and intensity of thought, what insight into the heart, and what observation of nature are requisite for the production of such poetry.'

Take from Wordsworth all which an honest criticism cannot but allow, and what is left will show how truly great he was. He had no humor, no dramatic power, and his temperament was of that dry and juiceless quality, that in all his published correspondence you shall not find a letter, but only essays. If we consider carefully where he was most successful, we shall find that it was not so

much in description of natural scenery, or delineation of character, as in vivid expression of the effect produced by external objects and events upon his own mind, and of the shape and hue (perhaps momentary) which they in turn took from his mood or temperament. His finest passages are always monologues. He had a fondness for particulars, and there are parts of his poems which remind us of local histories in the undue relative importance given to trivial matters. He was the historian of Wordsworthshire. This power of particularization (for it is as truly a power as generalization) is what gives such vigor and greatness to single lines and sentiments of Wordsworth, and to poems developing a single thought or sentiment. It was this that made him so fond of the sonnet. That sequestered nook forced upon him the limits which his fecundity (if I may not say his garrulity) was never self-denying enough to impose on itself. It suits his solitary and meditative temper, and it was there that Lamb (an admirable judge of what was permanent in literature) liked him best. Its narrow bounds, but fourteen paces from end to end, turn into a virtue his too common fault of giving undue prominence to every passing emotion. He excels in monologue, and the law of the sonnet tempers monologue with mercy. In 'The Excursion' we are driven to the subterfuge of a French verdict of extenuating circumstances. His mind had not that reach and elemental movement of Milton's, which, like the trade-wind, gathered to itself thoughts and images like stately fleets from every quarter; some deep with silks and spicery, some brooding over the silent thunders of their

battailous armaments, but all swept forward in their destined track, over the long billows of his verse, every inch of canvas strained by the unifying breath of their common epic impulse. It was an organ that Milton mastered, mighty in compass, capable equally of the trumpet's ardors or the slim delicacy of the flute, and sometimes it bursts forth in great crashes through his prose, as if he touched it for solace in the intervals of his toil. If Wordsworth sometimes put the trumpet to his lips, yet he lays it aside soon and willingly for his appropriate instrument, the pastoral reed. And it is not one that grew by any vulgar stream, but that which Apollo breathed through, tending the flocks of Admetus,—that which Pan endowed with every melody of the visible universe,—the same in which the soul of the despairing nymph took refuge and gifted with her dual nature,—so that ever and anon, amid the notes of human joy or sorrow, there comes suddenly a deeper and almost awful tone, thrilling us into dim consciousness of a forgotten divinity.

Wordsworth's absolute want of humor, while it no doubt confirmed his self-confidence by making him insensible both to the comical incongruity into which he was often led by his earlier theory concerning the language of poetry and to the not unnatural ridicule called forth by it, seems to have been indicative of a certain dulness of perception in other directions.[1] We cannot help feeling that the material of his nature was essentially prose, which,

[1] Nowhere is this displayed with more comic self-complacency than when he thought it needful to rewrite the ballad of *Helen of Kirconnel*,—a poem hardly to be matched

in his inspired moments, he had the power of transmuting, but which, whenever the inspiration failed or was factitious, remained obstinately leaden. The normal condition of many poets would seem to approach that temperature to which Wordsworth's mind could be raised only by the white heat of profoundly inward passion. And in proportion to the intensity needful to make his nature thoroughly aglow is the very high quality of his best verses. They seem rather the productions of nature than of man, and have the lastingness of such, delighting our age with the same startle of newness and beauty that pleased our youth. Is it his thought? It has

in any language for swiftness of movement and savage sincerity of feeling. Its shuddering compression is masterly.

> Curst be the heart that thought the thought,
> And curst the hand that fired the shot,
> When in my arms burd Helen dropt,
> That died to succor me!
>
> O, think ye not my heart was sair
> When my love dropt down and spake na mair?

Compare this with—

> Proud Gordon cannot bear the thoughts
> That through his brain are travelling,
> And, starting up, to Bruce's heart
> He launched a deadly javelin;
>
> Fair Ellen saw it when it came,
> And, *stepping forth to meet the same*,
> Did with her body cover
> The Youth, her chosen lover.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> And Bruce (*as soon as he had slain*
> *The Gordon*) sailed away to Spain,
> And fought with rage incessant
> Against the Moorish Crescent.

These are surely the verses of an attorney's clerk 'penning a stanza when he should engross'. It will be noticed that

the shifting inward lustre of diamond. Is it his feeling? It is as delicate as the impressions of fossil ferns. He seems to have caught and fixed forever in immutable grace the most evanescent and intangible of our intuitions, the very ripple-marks on the remotest shores of being. But this intensity of mood which insures high quality is by its very nature incapable of prolongation, and Wordsworth, in endeavoring it, falls more below himself, and is, more even than many poets his inferiors in imaginative quality, a poet of passages. Indeed, one cannot help having the feeling sometimes that the poem is there for the sake of these passages, rather than that these are the natural jets and elations of a mind

Wordsworth here also departs from his earlier theory of the language of poetry by substituting a javelin for a bullet as less modern and familiar. Had he written—

> And Gordon never gave a hint,
> But, having somewhat picked his flint,
> Let fly the fatal bullet
> That killed that lovely pullet,—

it would hardly have seemed more like a parody than the rest. He shows the same insensibility in a note upon the *Ancient Mariner* in the second edition of the *Lyrical Ballads*: 'The poem of my friend has indeed great defects; first, that the principal person has no distinct character, either in his profession of mariner, or as a human being who, having been long under the control of supernatural impressions, might be supposed himself to partake of something supernatural; secondly, that he does not act, but is continually acted upon; thirdly, that the events, having no necessary connection, do not produce each other; and lastly, that the imagery is somewhat laboriously accumulated.' Here is an indictment, to be sure, and drawn, plainly enough, by the attorney's clerk aforenamed. One would think that the strange charm of Coleridge's most truly original poems lay in this very emancipation from the laws of cause and effect.

energized by the rapidity of its own motion. In other words, the happy couplet or gracious image seems not to spring from the inspiration of the poem conceived as a whole, but rather to have dropped of itself into the mind of the poet in one of his rambles, who then, in a less rapt mood, has patiently built up around it a setting of verse too often ungraceful in form and of a material whose cheapness may cast a doubt on the priceless quality of the gem it encumbers.[1] During the most happily productive period of his life, Wordsworth was impatient of what may be called the mechanical portion of his art. His wife and sister seem from the first to have been his scribes. In later years, he had learned and often insisted on the truth that poetry was an art no less than a gift, and corrected his poems in cold blood, sometimes to their detriment. But he certainly had more of the vision than of the faculty divine, and was always a little numb on the side of form and proportion. Perhaps his best poem in these respects is the 'Laodamia', and it is not uninstructive to learn from his own lips that 'it cost him more trouble than almost anything of equal length he had ever written'. His longer poems (miscalled epical) have no more intimate bond of union than their more or less immediate relation to his own personality. Of character other than his own he had but a faint conception, and all the personages of 'The Excursion' that are

[1] A hundred times when, roving high and low,
I have been harassed with the toil of verse,
Much pains and little progress, and at once
Some lovely Image in the song rose up,
Full-formed, like Venus rising from the sea.
Prelude, bk. IV.

not Wordsworth are the merest shadows of himself upon mist, for his self-concentrated nature was incapable of projecting itself into the consciousness of other men and seeing the springs of action at their source in the recesses of individual character. The best parts of these longer poems are bursts of impassioned soliloquy, and his fingers were always clumsy at the *callida junctura*. The stream of narration is sluggish, if varied by times with pleasing reflections (*viridesque placido aequore sylvas*); we are forced to do our own rowing, and only when the current is hemmed in by some narrow gorge of the poet's personal consciousness do we feel ourselves snatched along on the smooth but impetuous rush of unmistakable inspiration. The fact that what is precious in Wordsworth's poetry was (more truly even than with some greater poets than he) a gift rather than an achievement should always be borne in mind in taking the measure of his power. I know not whether to call it height or depth, this peculiarity of his, but it certainly endows those parts of his work which we should distinguish as Wordsworthian with an unexpectedness and impressiveness of originality such as we feel in the presence of Nature herself. He seems to have been half conscious of this, and recited his own poems to all comers with an enthusiasm of wondering admiration that would have been profoundly comic[1] but for its simple sincerity and for the fact

[1] Mr. Emerson tells us that he was at first tempted to smile, and Mr. Ellis Yarnall (who saw him in his eightieth year) says, 'These quotations [from his own works] he read in a way that much impressed me; it seemed almost as if he were *awed by the greatness of his own power, the gifts with which he had been endowed*'. (The italics are mine.)

that William Wordsworth, Esquire, of Rydal Mount, was one person, and the William Wordsworth whom he so heartily reverenced quite another. We recognize two voices in him, as Stephano did in Caliban. There are Jeremiah and his scribe Baruch. If the prophet cease from dictating, the amanuensis, rather than be idle, employs his pen in jotting down some anecdotes of his master, how he one day went out and saw an old woman, and the next day did *not*, and so came home and dictated some verses on this ominous phenomenon, and how another day he saw a cow. These marginal annotations have been carelessly taken up into the text, have been religiously held by the pious to be orthodox scripture, and by dexterous exegesis have been made to yield deeply oracular meanings. Presently the real prophet takes up the word again and speaks as one divinely inspired, the Voice of a higher and invisible power. Wordsworth's better utterances have the bare sincerity, the absolute abstraction from time and place, the immunity from decay, that belong to the grand simplicities of the Bible. They seem not more his own than ours and every man's, the word of the inalterable Mind. This gift of his was naturally very much a matter of temperament, and accordingly by far the greater part of his finer product belongs to the period of his prime, ere Time had set his lumpish foot on the pedal that deadens the nerves of animal sensibility.[1] He did not grow

[1] His best poetry was written when he was under the immediate influence of Coleridge. Coleridge seems to have felt this, for it is evidently to Wordsworth that he alludes when he speaks of 'those who have been so well pleased that

as those poets do in whom the artistic sense is predominant. One of the most delightful fancies of the Genevese humorist, Toepffer, is the poet Albert, who, having had his portrait drawn by a highly idealizing hand, does his best afterwards to look like it. Many of Wordsworth's later poems seem like rather unsuccessful efforts to resemble his former self. They would never, as Sir John Harrington says of poetry, 'keep a child from play and an old man from the chimney-corner'.[1]

Chief Justice Marshall once blandly interrupted a junior counsel who was arguing certain obvious points of law at needless length, by saying, 'Brother Jones, there are *some* things which a Supreme Court of the United States sitting in equity may be presumed to know'. Wordsworth has this fault of enforcing and restating obvious points till the reader feels as if his own intelligence were somewhat underrated. He is over-conscientious in giving us full measure, and once profoundly absorbed in the sound of his own voice, he knows

I should, year after year, flow with a hundred nameless rills into *their* main stream'. (*Letters, Conversations, and Recollections of S. T. C.*, vol. i, pp. 5, 6.) 'Wordsworth found fault with the repetition of the concluding sound of the participles in Shakespeare's line about bees:

The singing masons building roofs of gold.

This, he said, was a line that Milton never would have written. Keats thought, on the other hand, that the repetition was in harmony with the continued note of the singers.' (Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography*.) Wordsworth writes to Crabb Robinson in 1837, 'My ear is susceptible to the clashing of sounds almost to disease'. One cannot help thinking that his training in these niceties was begun by Coleridge.

[1] In the Preface to his translation of the *Orlando Furioso*.

not when to stop. If he feels himself flagging, he has a droll way of keeping the floor, as it were, by asking himself a series of questions sometimes not needing, and often incapable of answer. There are three stanzas of such near the close of the First Part of 'Peter Bell', where Peter first catches a glimpse of the dead body in the water, all happily incongruous, and ending with one which reaches the height of comicality:—

> Is it a fiend that to a stake
> Of fire his desperate self is tethering?
> Or stubborn spirit doomed to yell,
> In solitary ward or cell,
> Ten thousand miles from all his brethren?

The same want of humor which made him insensible to incongruity may perhaps account also for the singular unconsciousness of disproportion which so often strikes us in his poetry. For example, a little farther on in 'Peter Bell' we find:—

> *Now*—like a tempest-shattered bark
> That overwhelmed and prostrate lies,
> And in a moment to the verge
> Is lifted of a foaming surge—
> Full suddenly the Ass doth rise!

And one cannot help thinking that the similes of the huge stone, the sea-beast, and the cloud, noble as they are in themselves, are somewhat too lofty for the service to which they are put.[1]

The movement of Wordsworth's mind was too slow and his mood too meditative for narrative poetry. He values his own thoughts and reflections

[1] In *Resolution and Independence*.

too much to sacrifice the least of them to the interests of his story. Moreover, it is never action that interests him, but the subtle motives that lead to or hinder it. 'The Wagoner' involuntarily suggests a comparison with 'Tam O'Shanter' infinitely to its own disadvantage. 'Peter Bell', full though it be of profound touches and subtle analysis, is lumbering and disjointed. Even Lamb was forced to confess that he did not like it. 'The White Doe', the most Wordsworthian of them all in the best meaning of the epithet, is also only the more truly so for being diffuse and reluctant. What charms in Wordsworth and will charm forever is the

> Happy tone
> Of meditation slipping in between
> The beauty coming and the beauty gone.

A few poets, in the exquisite adaptation of their words to the tune of our own feelings and fancies, in the charm of their manner, indefinable as the sympathic grace of woman, *are* everything to us without our being able to say that they are much in themselves. They rather narcotize than fortify. Wordsworth must subject our mood to his own before he admits us to his intimacy; but, once admitted, it is for life, and we find ourselves in his debt, not for what he has been to us in our hours of relaxation, but for what he has done for us as a reinforcement of faltering purpose and personal independence of character. His system of a Nature-cure, first professed by Dr. Jean Jacques and continued by Cowper, certainly breaks down as a whole. The Solitary of 'The Excursion', who has not been cured of his scepticism by living among the medicinal

mountains, is, so far as we can see, equally proof against the lectures of Pedler and Parson. Wordsworth apparently felt that this would be so, and accordingly never saw his way clear to finishing the poem. But the treatment, whether a panacea or not, is certainly wholesome, inasmuch as it inculcates abstinence, exercise, and uncontaminate air. I am not sure, indeed, that the Nature-cure theory does not tend to foster in constitutions less vigorous than Wordsworth's what Milton would call a fugitive and cloistered virtue at a dear expense of manlier qualities. The ancients and our own Elizabethans, ere spiritual megrims had become fashionable, perhaps made more out of life by taking a frank delight in its action and passion and by grappling with the facts of this world, rather than muddling themselves over the insoluble problems of another. If they had not discovered the picturesque, as we understand it, they found surprisingly fine scenery in man and his destiny, and would have seen something ludicrous, it may be suspected, in the spectacle of a grown man running to hide his head in the apron of the Mighty Mother whenever he had an ache in his finger or got a bruise in the tussle for existence.

But when, as I have said, our impartiality has made all those qualifications and deductions against which even the greatest poet may not plead his privilege, what is left to Wordsworth is enough to justify his fame. Even where his genius is wrapped in clouds, the unconquerable lightning of imagination struggles through, flashing out unexpected vistas, and illuminating the humdrum pathway of our daily thought with a radiance of

momentary consciousness that seems like a revelation. If it be the most delightful function of the poet to set our lives to music, yet perhaps he will be even more sure of our maturer gratitude if he do his part also as moralist and philosopher to purify and enlighten; if he define and encourage our vacillating perceptions of duty; if he piece together our fragmentary apprehensions of our own life and that larger life whose unconscious instruments we are, making of the jumbled bits of our dissected map of experience a coherent chart. In the great poets there is an exquisite sensibility both of soul and sense that sympathizes like gossamer sea-moss with every movement of the element in which it floats, but which is rooted on the solid rock of our common sympathies. Wordsworth shows less of this finer feminine fibre of organization than one or two of his contemporaries, notably than Coleridge or Shelley; but he was a masculine thinker, and in his more characteristic poems there is always a kernel of firm conclusion from far-reaching principles that stimulates thought and challenges meditation. Groping in the dark passages of life, we come upon some axiom of his, as it were a wall that gives us our bearings and enables us to find an outlet. Compared with Goethe we feel that he lacks that serene impartiality of mind which results from breadth of culture; nay, he seems narrow, insular, almost provincial. He reminds us of those saints of Dante who gather brightness by revolving on their own axis. But through this very limitation of range he gains perhaps in intensity and the impressiveness which results from eagerness of personal conviction.

If we read Wordsworth through, as I have just done, we find ourselves changing our mind about him at every other page, so uneven is he. If we read our favorite poems or passages only, he will seem uniformly great. And even as regards 'The Excursion' we should remember how few long poems will bear consecutive reading. For my part I know of but one,—the 'Odyssey'.

None of our great poets can be called popular in any exact sense of the word, for the highest poetry deals with thoughts and emotions which inhabit, like rarest sea-mosses, the doubtful limits of that shore between our abiding divine and our fluctuating human nature, rooted in the one, but living in the other, seldom laid bare, and otherwise visible only at exceptional moments of entire calm and clearness. Of no other poet except Shakespeare have so many phrases become household words as of Wordsworth. If Pope has made current more epigrams of worldly wisdom, to Wordsworth belongs the nobler praise of having defined for us, and given us for a daily possession, those faint and vague suggestions of other-worldliness of whose gentle ministry with our baser nature the hurry and bustle of life scarcely ever allowed us to be conscious. He has won for himself a secure immortality by a depth of intuition which makes only the best minds at their best hours worthy, or indeed capable, of his companionship, and by a homely sincerity of human sympathy which reaches the humblest heart. Our language owes him gratitude for the habitual purity and abstinence of his style, and we who speak it, for having emboldened us to take delight in simple things, and to trust ourselves to

our own instincts. And he hath his reward. It needs not to bid

> Renowned Spenser, lie a thought more nigh
> To learned Chaucer, and rare Beaumont lie
> A little nearer Spenser;—

for there is no fear of crowding in that little society with whom he is now enrolled as fifth in the succession of the great English Poets.

WALT WHITMAN

1819–1892

PREFACE, 'LEAVES OF GRASS' (1855)

America does not repel the past or what it has produced under its forms or amid other politics or the idea of castes or the old religions . . . accepts the lesson with calmness . . . is not so impatient as has been supposed that the slough still sticks to opinions and manners and literature while the life which served its requirements has passed into the new life of the new forms . . . perceives that the corpse is slowly borne from the eating and sleeping rooms of the house . . . perceives that it waits a little while in the door . . . that it was fittest for its days . . . that its action has descended to the stalwart and wellshaped heir who approaches . . . and that he shall be fittest for his days.

The Americans of all nations at any time upon the earth have probably the fullest poetical nature. The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem. In the history of the earth hitherto the largest and most stirring appear tame and orderly to their ampler largeness and stir. Here at last is something in the doings of man that corresponds with the broadcast doings of the day and night. Here is not merely a nation but a teeming nation of nations. Here is action untied from strings necessarily blind to particulars and details magnificently moving in vast masses. Here is the hospitality which forever indicates heroes. . . . Here

are the roughs and beards and space and ruggedness and nonchalance that the soul loves. Here the performance disdaining the trivial unapproached in the tremendous audacity of its crowds and groupings and the push of its perspective spreads with crampless and flowing breadth and showers its prolific and splendid extravagance. One sees it must indeed own the riches of the summer and winter, and need never be bankrupt while corn grows from the ground or the orchards drop apples or the bays contain fish or men beget children upon women.

Other states indicate themselves in their deputies . . . but the genius of the United States is not best or most in its executives or legislatures, nor in its ambassadors or authors or colleges or churches or parlors, nor even in its newspapers or inventors . . . but always most in the common people. Their manners speech dress friendships—the freshness and candor of their physiognomy—the picturesque looseness of their carriage . . . their deathless attachment to freedom—their aversion to anything indecorous or soft or mean—the practical acknowledgment of the citizens of one state by the citizens of all other states—the fierceness of their roused resentment—their curiosity and welcome of novelty —their self-esteem and wonderful sympathy—their susceptibility to a slight—the air they have of persons who never knew how it felt to stand in the presence of superiors—the fluency of their speech—their delight in music, the sure symptom of manly tenderness and native elegance of soul . . . their good temper and openhandedness—the terrible significance of their elections—the President's tak-

ing off his hat to them not they to him—these too are unrhymed poetry. It awaits the gigantic and generous treatment worthy of it.

The largeness of nature or the nation were monstrous without a corresponding largeness and generosity of the spirit of the citizen. Not nature nor swarming states nor streets and steamships nor prosperous business nor farms nor capital nor learning may suffice for the ideal of man . . . nor suffice the poet. No reminiscences may suffice either. A live nation can always cut a deep mark and can have the best authority the cheapest . . . namely from its own soul. This is the sum of the profitable uses of individuals or states and of present action and grandeur and of the subjects of poets.—As if it were necessary to trot back generation after generation to the eastern records! As if the beauty and sacredness of the demonstrable must fall behind that of the mythical! As if men do not make their mark out of any times! As if the opening of the western continent by discovery and what has transpired since in North and South America were less than the small theatre of the antique or the aimless sleepwalking of the middle ages! The pride of the United States leaves the wealth and finesse of the cities and all returns of commerce and agriculture and all the magnitude of geography or shows of exterior victory to enjoy the breed of fullsized men or one fullsized man unconquerable and simple.

The American poets are to enclose old and new for America is the race of races. Of them a bard is to be commensurate with a people. To him the other continents arrive as contributions . . . he gives

them reception for their sake and his own sake. His spirit responds to his country's spirit . . . he incarnates its geography and natural life and rivers and lakes. Mississippi with annual freshets and changing chutes, Missouri and Columbia and Ohio and Saint Lawrence with the falls and beautiful masculine Hudson, do not embouchure where they spend themselves more than they embouchure into him. The blue breadth over the inland sea of Virginia and Maryland and the sea off Massachusetts and Maine and over Manhattan bay and over Champlain and Erie and over Ontario and Huron and Michigan and Superior, and over the Texan and Mexican and Floridian and Cuban seas and over the seas off California and Oregon, is not tallied by the blue breadth of the waters below more than the breadth of above and below is tallied by him. When the long Atlantic coast stretches longer and the Pacific coast stretches longer he easily stretches with them north or south. He spans between them also from east to west and reflects what is between them. On him rise solid growths that offset the growths of pine and cedar and hemlock and liveoak and locust and chestnut and cypress and hickory and limetree and cottonwood and tuliptree and cactus and wildvine and tamarind and persimmon . . . and tangles as tangled as any canebreak or swamp . . . and forests coated with transparent ice and icicles hanging from the boughs and crackling in the wind . . . and sides and peaks of mountains . . . and pasturage sweet and free as savannah or upland or prairie . . . with flights and songs and screams that answer those of the wildpigeon and highhold and orchard-oriole and coot and surf-duck

and redshouldered-hawk and fish-hawk and white-ibis and indian-hen and cat-owl and water-pheasant and qua-bird and pied-sheldrake and blackbird and mockingbird and buzzard and condor and night-heron and eagle. To him the hereditary countenance descends both mother's and father's. To him enter the essences of the real things and past and present events—of the enormous diversity of temperature and agriculture and mines—the tribes of red aborigines—the weather-beaten vessels entering new ports or making landings on rocky coasts—the first settlements north or south—the rapid stature and muscle—the haughty defiance of '76, and the war and peace and formation of the constitution . . . the union always surrounded by blatherers and always calm and impregnable—the perpetual coming of immigrants—the wharf-hem'd cities and superior marine—the unsurveyed interior—the log-houses and clearings and wild animals and hunters and trappers . . . the free commerce—the fisheries and whaling and gold-digging—the endless gestation of new states—the convening of Congress every December, the members duly coming up from all climates and the uttermost parts . . . the noble character of the young mechanics and of all free American workmen and workwomen . . . the general ardor and friendliness and enterprise—the perfect equality of the female with the male . . . the large amativeness—the fluid movement of the population—the factories and mercantile life and laborsaving machinery—the Yankee swap—the New-York firemen and the target excursion—the southern plantation life—the character of the northeast and of the northwest and southwest—slavery and the tremu-

lous spreading of hands to protect it, and the stern opposition to it which shall never cease till it ceases or the speaking of tongues and the moving of lips cease. For such the expression of the American poet is to be transcendant and new. It is to be indirect and not direct or descriptive or epic. Its quality goes through these to much more. Let the age and wars of other nations be chanted and their eras and characters be illustrated and that finish the verse. Not so the great psalm of the republic. Here the theme is creative and has vista. Here comes one among the wellbeloved stonecutters and plans with decision and science and sees the solid and beautiful forms of the future where there are now no solid forms.

Of all nations the United States with veins full of poetical stuff most need poets and will doubtless have the greatest and use them the greatest. Their Presidents shall not be their common referee so much as their poets shall. Of all mankind the great poet is the equable man. Not in him but off from him things are grotesque or eccentric or fail of their sanity. Nothing out of its place is good and nothing in its place is bad. He bestows on every object or quality its fit proportions neither more nor less. He is the arbiter of the diverse and he is the key. He is the equalizer of his age and land . . . he supplies what wants supplying and checks what wants checking. If peace is the routine out of him speaks the spirit of peace, large, rich, thrifty, building vast and populous cities, encouraging agriculture and the arts and commerce—lighting the study of man, the soul, immortality—federal, state or municipal government, marriage, health, free trade, inter-

travel by land and sea . . . nothing too close, nothing too far off . . . the stars not too far off. In war he is the most deadly force of the war. Who recruits him recruits horse and foot . . . he fetches parks of artillery the best that engineer ever knew. If the time becomes slothful and heavy he knows how to arouse it . . . he can make every word he speaks draw blood. Whatever stagnates in the flat of custom or obedience or legislation he never stagnates. Obedience does not master him, he masters it. High up out of reach he stands turning a concentrated light . . . he turns the pivot with his finger . . . he baffles the swiftest runners as he stands and easily overtakes and envelops them. The time straying toward infidelity and confections and persiflage he withholds by his steady faith . . . he spreads out his dishes . . . he offers the sweet firmfibred meat that grows men and women. His brain is the ultimate brain. He is no arguer . . . he is judgment. He judges not as the judge judges but as the sun falling around a helpless thing. As he sees the farthest he has the most faith. His thoughts are the hymns of the praise of things. In the talk on the soul and eternity and God off of his equal plane he is silent. He sees eternity less like a play with a prologue and denouement . . . he sees eternity in men and women . . . he does not see men and women as dreams or dots. Faith is the antiseptic of the soul . . . it pervades the common people and preserves them . . . they never give up believing and expecting and trusting. There is that indescribable freshness and unconsciousness about an illiterate person that humbles and mocks the power of the noblest expressive genius. The

poet sees for a certainty how one not a great artist may be just as sacred as the greatest artist. . . . The power to destroy or remould is freely used by him but never the power of attack. What is past is past. If he does not expose superior models and prove himself by every step he takes he is not what is wanted. The presence of the greatest poet conquers . . . not parleying or struggling or any prepared attempts. Now he has passed that way see after him! there is not left any vestige of despair or misanthropy or cunning or exclusiveness or the ignominy of a nativity or color or delusion of hell or the necessity of hell . . . and no man thenceforward shall be degraded for ignorance or weakness or sin.

The greatest poet hardly knows pettiness or triviality. If he breathes into any thing that was before thought small it dilates with the grandeur and life of the universe. He is a seer . . . he is individual . . . he is complete in himself . . . the others are as good as he, only he sees it and they do not. He is not one of the chorus . . . he does not stop for any regulations . . . he is the president of regulation. What the eyesight does to the rest he does to the rest. Who knows the curious mystery of the eyesight? The other senses corroborate themselves, but this is removed from any proof but its own and foreruns the identities of the spiritual world. A single glance of it mocks all the investigations of man and all the instruments and books of the earth and all reasoning. What is marvelous? what is unlikely? what is impossible or baseless or vague? after you have once just opened the space of a peachpit and given audience to far and near

and to the sunset and had all things enter with electric swiftness softly and duly without confusion or jostling or jam.

The land and sea, the animals fishes and birds, the sky of heaven and the orbs, the forests mountains and rivers, are not small themes . . . but folks expect of the poet to indicate more than the beauty and dignity which always attach to dumb real objects . . . they expect him to indicate the path between reality and their souls. Men and women perceive the beauty well enough . . . probably as well as he. The passionate tenacity of hunters, woodmen, early risers, cultivators of gardens and orchards and fields, the love of healthy women for the manly form, seafaring persons, drivers of horses, the passion for light and the open air, all is an old varied sign of the unfailing perception of beauty and of a residence of the poetic in outdoor people. They can never be assisted by poets to perceive . . . some may but they never can. The poetic quality is not marshalled in rhyme or uniformity or abstract addresses to things nor in melancholy complaints or good precepts, but is the life of these and much else and is in the soul. The profit of rhyme is that it drops seeds of a sweeter and more luxuriant rhyme, and of uniformity that it conveys itself into its own roots in the ground out of sight. The rhyme and uniformity of perfect poems show the free growth of metrical laws and bud from them as unerringly and loosely as lilacs or roses on a bush, and take shapes as compact as the shapes of chestnuts and oranges and melons and pears, and shed the perfume impalpable to form. The fluency and ornaments of the finest poems or music or orations

or recitations are not independent but dependent. All beauty comes from beautiful blood and a beautiful brain. If the greatnesses are in conjunction in a man or woman it is enough . . . the fact will prevail through the universe . . . but the gaggery and gilt of a million years will not prevail. Who troubles himself about his ornaments or fluency is lost. This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God, have patience and indulgence toward the people, take off your hat to nothing known or unknown or to any man or number of men, go freely with powerful uneducated persons and with the young and with the mothers of families, read these leaves in the open air every season of every year of your life, reexamine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body. . . . The poet shall not spend his time in unneeded work. He shall know that the ground is always ready plowed and manured . . . others may not know it but he shall. He shall go directly to the creation. His trust shall master the trust of everything he touches . . . and shall master all attachment.

The known universe has one complete lover and that is the greatest poet. He consumes an eternal passion and is indifferent which chance happens

and which possible contingency of fortune or misfortune and persuades daily and hourly his delicious pay. What balks or breaks others is fuel for his burning progress to contact and amorous joy. Other proportions of the reception of pleasure dwindle to nothing to his proportions. All expected from heaven or from the highest he is rapport with in the sight of the daybreak or a scene of the winter-woods or the presence of children playing or with his arm round the neck of a man or woman. His love above all love has leisure and expanse . . . he leaves room ahead of himself. He is no irresolute or suspicious lover . . . he is sure . . . he scorns intervals. His experience and the showers and thrills are not for nothing. Nothing can jar him . . . suffering and darkness cannot—death and fear cannot. To him complaint and jealousy and envy are corpses buried and rotten in the earth . . . he saw them buried. The sea is not surer of the shore or the shore of the sea than he is of the fruition of his love and of all perfection and beauty.

The fruition of beauty is no chance of hit or miss . . . it is inevitable as life . . . it is exact and plumb as gravitation. From the eyesight proceeds another eyesight and from the hearing proceeds another hearing and from the voice proceeds another voice eternally curious of the harmony of things with man. To these respond perfections not only in the committees that were supposed to stand for the rest but in the rest themselves just the same. These understand the law of perfection in masses and floods . . . that its finish is to each for itself and onward from itself . . . that it is profuse and impartial . . . that there is not a minute of the light

or dark nor an acre of the earth or sea without it —nor any direction of the sky nor any trade or employment nor any turn of events. This is the reason that about the proper expression of beauty there is precision and balance . . . one part does not need to be thrust above another. The best singer is not the one who has the most lithe and powerful organ . . . the pleasure of poems is not in them that take the handsomest measure and similes and sound.

Without effort and without exposing in the least how it is done the greatest poet brings the spirit of any or all events and passions and scenes and persons some more and some less to bear on your individual character as you hear or read. To do this well is to compete with the laws that pursue and follow time. What is the purpose must surely be there and the clue of it must be there . . . and the faintest indication is the indication of the best and then becomes the clearest indication. Past and present and future are not disjoined but joined. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is. He drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet . . . he says to the past, Rise and walk before me that I may realize you. He learns the lesson . . . he places himself where the future becomes present. The greatest poet does not only dazzle his rays over character and scenes and passions . . . he finally ascends and finishes all . . . he exhibits the pinnacles that no man can tell what they are for or what is beyond . . . he glows a moment on the extremest verge. He is most wonderful in his last half-hidden smile or frown . . . by

that flash of the moment of parting the one that sees it shall be encouraged or terrified afterwards for many years. The greatest poet does not moralize or make applications of morals . . . he knows the soul. The soul has that measureless pride which consists in never acknowledging any lessons but its own. But it has sympathy as measureless as its pride and the one balances the other and neither can stretch too far while it stretches in company with the other. The inmost secrets of art sleep with the twain. The greatest poet has lain close betwixt both and they are vital in his style and thoughts.

The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters is simplicity. Nothing is better than simplicity . . . nothing can make up for excess or for the lack of definiteness. To carry on the heave of impulse and pierce intellectual depths and give all subjects their articulations are powers neither common nor very uncommon. But to speak in literature with the perfect rectitude and insouciance of the movements of animals and the unimpeachableness of the sentiment of trees in the woods and grass by the roadside is the flawless triumph of art. If you have looked on him who has achieved it you have looked on one of the masters of the artists of all nations and times. You shall not contemplate the flight of the graygull over the bay or the mettlesome action of the blood horse or the tall leaning of sunflowers on their stalk or the appearance of the sun journeying through heaven or the appearance of the moon afterward with any more satisfaction than you shall contemplate him. The greatest poet has less a marked style and is more the channel of thoughts and

things without increase or diminution, and is the free channel of himself. He swears to his art, I will not be meddlesome, I will not have in my writing any elegance or effect or originality to hang in the way between me and the rest like curtains. I will have nothing hang in the way, not the richest curtains. What I tell I tell for precisely what it is. Let who may exalt or startle or fascinate or soothe I will have purposes as health or heat or snow has and be as regardless of observation. What I experience or portray shall go from my composition without a shred of my composition. You shall stand by my side and look in the mirror with me.

The old red blood and stainless gentility of great poets will be proved by their unconstraint. A heroic person walks at his ease through and out of that custom or precedent or authority that suits him not. Of the traits of the brotherhood of writers savans musicians inventors and artists nothing is finer than silent defiance advancing from new free forms. In the need of poems philosophy politics mechanism science behaviour, the craft of art, an appropriate native grand-opera, shipcraft, or any craft, he is greatest forever and forever who contributes the greatest original practical example. The cleanest expression is that which finds no sphere worthy of itself and makes one.

The messages of great poets to each man and woman are, Come to us on equal terms, Only then can you understand us, We are no better than you, What we enclose you enclose, What we enjoy you may enjoy. Did you suppose there could be only one Supreme? We affirm there can be unnumbered Supremes, and that one does not countervail another

any more than one eyesight countervails another . . . and that men can be good or grand only of the consciousness of their supremacy within them. What do you think is the grandeur of storms and dismemberments and the deadliest battles and wrecks and the wildest fury of the elements and the power of the sea and the motion of nature and of the throes of human desires and dignity and hate and love? It is that something in the soul which says, Rage on, Whirl on, I tread master here and everywhere, Master of the spasms of the sky and of the shatter of the sea, Master of nature and passion and death, And of all terror and all pain.

The American bards shall be marked for generosity and affection and for encouraging competitors. . . . They shall be kosmos . . . without monopoly or secresy . . . glad to pass any thing to any one . . . hungry for equals night and day. They shall not be careful of riches and privilege they shall be riches and privilege . . . they shall perceive who the most affluent man is. The most affluent man is he that confronts all the shows he sees by equivalents out of the stronger wealth of himself. The American bard shall delineate no class of persons nor one or two out of the strata of interests nor love most nor truth most nor the soul most nor the body most . . . and not be for the eastern states more than the western or the northern states more than the southern.

Exact science and its practical movements are no checks on the greatest poet but always his encouragement and support. The outset and remembrance are there . . . there are the arms that lifted him first and brace him best . . . there he returns

after all his goings and comings. The sailor and traveler . . . the atomist chemist astronomer geologist phrenologist spiritualist mathematician historian and lexicographer are not poets, but they are the lawgivers of poets and their construction underlies the structure of every perfect poem. No matter what rises or is uttered they sent the seed of the conception of it . . . of them and by them stand the visible proofs of souls . . . always of their fatherstuff must be begotten the sinewy races of bards. If there shall be love and content between the father and the son and if the greatness of the son is the exuding of the greatness of the father there shall be love between the poet and the man of demonstrable science. In the beauty of poems are the tuft and final applause of science.

Great is the faith of the flush of knowledge and of the investigation of the depths of qualities and things. Cleaving and circling here swells the soul of the poet yet is president of itself always. The depths are fathomless and therefore calm. The innocence and nakedness are resumed . . . they are neither modest nor immodest. The whole theory of the special and supernatural and all that was twined with it or educed out of it departs as a dream. What has ever happened . . . what happens and whatever may or shall happen, the vital laws enclose all . . . they are sufficient for any case and for all cases . . . none to be hurried or retarded . . . any miracle of affairs or persons inadmissible in the vast clear scheme where every motion and every spear of grass and the frames and spirits of men and women and all that concerns them are unspeakably perfect miracles all referring to all and each distinct

and in its place. It is also not consistent with the reality of the soul to admit that there is anything in the known universe more divine than men and women.

Men and women and the earth and all upon it are simply to be taken as they are, and the investigation of their past and present and future shall be unintermitted and shall be done with perfect candor. Upon this basis philosophy speculates ever looking toward the poet, ever regarding the eternal tendencies of all toward happiness never inconsistent with what is clear to the senses and to the soul. For the eternal tendencies of all toward happiness make the only point of sane philosophy. Whatever comprehends less than that . . . whatever is less than the laws of light and of astronomical motion . . . or less than the laws that follow the thief the liar the glutton and the drunkard through this life and doubtless afterward . . . or less than vast stretches of time or the slow formation of density or the patient upheaving of strata—is of no account. Whatever would put God in a poem or system of philosophy as contending against some being or influence, is also of no account. Sanity and ensemble characterise the great master . . . spoilt in one principle all is spoilt. The great master has nothing to do with miracles. He sees health for himself in being one of the mass . . . he sees the hiatus in singular eminence. To the perfect shape comes common ground. To be under the general law is great for that is to correspond with it. The master knows that he is unspeakably great and that all are unspeakably great . . . that nothing for instance is greater than to conceive children and

bring them up well . . . that to be is just as great as to perceive or tell.

In the make of the great masters the idea of political liberty is indispensable. Liberty takes the adherence of heroes wherever men and women exist . . . but never takes any adherence or welcome from the rest more than from poets. They are the voice and exposition of liberty. They out of ages are worthy the grand idea . . . to them it is confided and they must sustain it. Nothing has precedence of it and nothing can warp or degrade it. The attitude of great poets is to cheer up slaves and horrify despots. The turn of their necks, the sound of their feet, the motions of their wrists, are full of hazard to the one and hope to the other. Come nigh them awhile and though they neither speak or advise you shall learn the faithful American lesson. Liberty is poorly served by men whose good intent is quelled from one failure or two failures or any number of failures, or from the casual indifference or ingratitude of the people, or from the sharp show of the tushes of power, or the bringing to bear soldiers and cannon or any penal statutes. Liberty relies upon itself, invites no one, promises nothing, sits in calmness and light, is positive and composed, and knows no discouragement. The battle rages with many a loud alarm and frequent advance and retreat . . . the enemy triumphs . . . the prison, the handcuffs, the iron necklace and anklet, the scaffold, garrote and leadballs do their work . . . the cause is asleep . . . the strong throats are choked with their own blood . . . the young men drop their eyelashes toward the ground when they pass each other . . . and is liberty gone out of that place? No never.

When liberty goes it is not the first to go nor the second nor third to go . . . it waits for all the rest to go . . . it is the last. . . . When the memories of the old martyrs are faded utterly away . . . when the large names of patriots are laughed at in the public halls from the lips of the orators . . . when the boys are no more christened after the same but christened after tyrants and traitors instead . . . when the laws of the free are grudgingly permitted and laws for informers and bloodmoney are sweet to the taste of the people . . . when I and you walk abroad upon the earth stung with compassion at the sight of numberless brothers answering our equal friendship and calling no man master—and when we are elated with noble joy at the sight of slaves . . . when the soul retires in the cool communion of the night and surveys its experience and has much extasy over the word and deed that put back a helpless innocent person into the gripe of the gripers or into any cruel inferiority . . . when those in all parts of these states who could easier realize the true American character but do not yet —when the swarms of cringers, suckers, doughfaces, lice of politics, planners of sly involutions for their own preferment to city offices or state legislatures or the judiciary or congress or the presidency, obtain a response of love and natural deference from the people whether they get the offices or no . . . when it is better to be a bound booby and rogue in office at a high salary than the poorest free mechanic or farmer with his hat unmoved from his head and firm eyes and a candid and generous heart . . . and when servility by town or state or the federal government or any oppression

on a large scale or small scale can be tried on without its own punishment following duly after in exact proportion against the smallest chance of escape . . . or rather when all life and all the souls of men and women are discharged from any part of the earth—then only shall the instinct of liberty be discharged from that part of the earth.

As the attributes of the poets of the kosmos concentre in the real body and soul and in the pleasure of things they possess the superiority of genuineness over all fiction and romance. As they emit themselves facts are showered over with light . . . the daylight is lit with more volatile light . . . also the deep between the setting and rising sun goes deeper many fold. Each precise object or condition or combination or process exhibits a beauty . . . the multiplication table its—old age its—the carpenter's trade its—the grand-opera its . . . the hugehulled cleanshaped New-York clipper at sea under steam or full sail gleams with unmatched beauty . . . the American circles and large harmonies of government gleam with theirs . . . and the commonest definite intentions and actions with theirs. The poets of the kosmos advance through all interpositions and coverings and turmoils and stratagems to first principles. They are of use . . . they dissolve poverty from its need and riches from its conceit. You large proprietor they say shall not realize or perceive more than any one else. The owner of the library is not he who holds a legal title to it having bought and paid for it. Any one and every one is owner of the library who can read the same through all the varieties of tongues and subjects and styles, and in whom they enter with ease

and take residence and force toward paternity and maternity, and make supple and powerful and rich and large. . . . These American states strong and healthy and accomplished shall receive no pleasure from violations of natural models and must not permit them. In paintings or mouldings or carvings in mineral or wood, or in the illustrations of books or newspapers, or in any comic or tragic prints, or in the patterns of woven stuffs or anything to beautify rooms or furniture or costumes, or to put upon cornices or monuments or on the prows or sterns of ships, or to put anywhere before the human eye indoors or out, that which distorts honest shapes or which creates unearthly beings or places or contingencies is a nuisance and revolt. Of the human form especially it is so great it must never be made ridiculous. Of ornaments to a work nothing outre can be allowed . . . but those ornaments can be allowed that conform to the perfect facts of the open air and that flow out of the nature of the work and come irrepressibly from it and are necessary to the completion of the work. Most works are most beautiful without ornament. . . . Exaggerations will be revenged in human physiology. Clean and vigorous children are jetted and conceived only in those communities where the models of natural forms are public every day. . . . Great genius and the people of these states must never be demeaned to romances. As soon as histories are properly told there is no more need of romances.

The great poets are also to be known by the absence in them of tricks and by the justification of perfect personal candor. Then folks echo a new cheap joy and a divine voice leaping from their

brains: How beautiful is candor! All faults may be forgiven of him who has perfect candor. Henceforth let no man of us lie, for we have seen that openness wins the inner and outer world and that there is no single exception, and that never since our earth gathered itself in a mass have deceit or subterfuge or prevarication attracted its smallest particle or the faintest tinge of a shade—and that through the enveloping wealth and rank of a state or the whole republic of states a sneak or sly person shall be discovered and despised . . . and that the soul has never been once fooled and never can be fooled . . . and thrift without the loving nod of the soul is only a foetid puff . . . and there never grew up in any of the continents of the globe nor upon any planet or satellite or star, nor upon the asteroids, nor in any part of ethereal space, nor in the midst of density, nor under the fluid wet of the sea, nor in the condition which precedes the birth of babes, nor at any time during the changes of life, nor in that condition that follows what we term death, nor in any stretch of abeyance or action afterward of vitality, nor in any process of formation or reformation anywhere, a being whose instinct hated the truth.

Extreme caution or prudence, the soundest organic health, large hope and comparison and fondness for women and children, large alimentiveness and destructiveness and causality, with a perfect sense of the oneness of nature and the propriety of the same spirit applied to human affairs . . . these are called up of the float of the brain of the world to be parts of the greatest poet from his birth out of his mother's womb and from

her birth out of her mother's. Caution seldom goes far enough. It has been thought that the prudent citizen was the citizen who applied himself to solid gains and did well for himself and his family and completed a lawful life without debt or crime. The greatest poet sees and admits these economies as he sees the economies of food and sleep, but has higher notions of prudence than to think he gives much when he gives a few slight attentions at the latch of the gate. The premises of the prudence of life are not the hospitality of it or the ripeness and harvest of it. Beyond the independence of a little sum laid aside for burial-money, and of a few clapboards around and shingles overhead on a lot of American soil owned, and the easy dollars that supply the year's plain clothing and meals, the melancholy prudence of the abandonment of such a great being as a man is to the toss and pallor of years of moneymaking with all their scorching days and icy nights and all their stifling deceits and underhanded dodgings, or infinitesimals of parlors, or shameless stuffing while others starve . . . and all the loss of the bloom and odor of the earth and of the flowers and atmosphere and of the sea and of the true taste of the women and men you pass or have to do with in youth or middle age, and the issuing sickness and desperate revolt at the close of a life without elevation or naivete, and the ghastly chatter of a death without serenity or majesty, is the great fraud upon modern civilization and forethought, blotching the surface and system which civilization undeniably drafts, and moistening with tears the immense features it spreads and spreads with such velocity before the

reached kisses of the soul. . . . Still the right explanation remains to be made about prudence. The prudence of the mere wealth and respectability of the most esteemed life appears too faint for the eye to observe at all when little and large alike drop quietly aside at the thought of the prudence suitable for immortality. What is wisdom that fills the thinness of a year or seventy or eighty years to wisdom spaced out by ages and coming back at a certain time with strong reinforcements and rich presents and the clear faces of wedding-guests as far as you can look in every direction running gaily toward you? Only the soul is of itself . . . all else has reference to what ensues. All that a person does or thinks is of consequence. Not a move can a man or woman make that affects him or her in a day or a month or any part of the direct lifetime or the hour of death but the same affects him or her onward afterward through the indirect lifetime. The indirect is always as great and real as the direct. The spirit receives from the body just as much as it gives to the body. Not one name of word or deed . . . not of venereal sores or discolorations . . . not the privacy of the onanist . . . not of the putrid veins of gluttons or rum-drinkers . . . not peculation or cunning or betrayal or murder . . . no serpentine poison of those that seduce women . . . not the foolish yielding of women . . . not prostitution . . . not of any depravity of young men . . . not of the attainment of gain by discreditable means . . . not any nastiness of appetite . . . not any harshness of officers to men or judges to prisoners or fathers to sons or sons to fathers or husbands to wives or bosses to their boys . . . not

of greedy looks or malignant wishes . . . nor any of the wiles practised by people upon themselves . . . ever is or ever can be stamped on the programme but it is duly realized and returned, and that returned in further performances . . . and they returned again. Nor can the push of charity or personal force ever be any thing else than the profoundest reason, whether it brings arguments to hand or no. No specification is necessary . . . to add or subtract or divide is in vain. Little or big, learned or unlearned, white or black, legal or illegal, sick or well, from the first inspiration down the windpipe to the last expiration out of it, all that a male or female does that is vigorous and benevolent and clean is so much sure profit to him or her in the unshakable order of the universe and through the whole scope of it forever. If the savage or felon is wise it is well . . . if the greatest poet or savan is wise it is simply the same . . . if the President or chief justice is wise it is the same . . . if the young mechanic or farmer is wise it is no more or less . . . if the prostitute is wise it is no more nor less. The interest will come round . . . all will come round. All the best actions of war and peace . . . all help given to relatives and strangers and the poor and old and sorrowful and young children and widows and the sick, and to all shunned persons . . . all furtherance of fugitives and of the escape of slaves . . . all the self-denial that stood steady and aloof on wrecks and saw others take the seats of the boats . . . all offering of substance or life for the good old cause, or for a friend's sake or opinion's sake . . . all pains of enthusiasts scoffed at by their neighbors . . . all the vast sweet love and precious

suffering of mothers . . . all honest men baffled in strifes recorded or unrecorded . . . all the grandeur and good of the few ancient nations whose fragments of annals we inherit . . . and all the good of the hundreds of far mightier and more ancient nations unknown to us by name or date or location . . . all that was ever manfully begun, whether it succeeded or not . . . all that has at any time been well suggested out of the divine heart of man or by the divinity of his mouth or by the shaping of his great hands . . . and all that is well thought or done this day on any part of the surface of the globe . . . or on any of the wandering stars or fixed stars by those there as we are here . . . or that is henceforth to be well thought or done by you whoever you are, or by any one—these singly and wholly inured at their time and inure now and will inure always to the identities from which they sprung or shall spring. . . . Did you guess any of them lived only its moment? The world does not so exist . . . no parts palpable or impalpable so exist . . . no result exists now without being from its long antecedent result, and that from its antecedent, and so backward without the farthest mentionable spot coming a bit nearer to the beginning than any other spot. . . . Whatever satisfies the soul is truth. The prudence of the greatest poet answers at last the craving and glut of the soul, is not contemptuous of less ways of prudence if they conform to its ways, puts off nothing, permits no let-up for its own case or any case, has no particular sabbath or judgment-day, divides not the living from the dead or the righteous from the unrighteous, is satisfied with the present, matches every thought

or act by its correlative, knows no possible forgiveness or deputed atonement . . . knows that the young man who composedly periled his life and lost it has done exceeding well for himself, while the man who has not periled his life and retains it to old age in riches and ease has perhaps achieved nothing for himself worth mentioning . . . and that only that person has no great prudence to learn who has learnt to prefer real long-lived things, and favors body and soul the same, and perceives the indirect assuredly following the direct, and what evil or good he does leaping onward and waiting to meet him again—and who in his spirit in any emergency whatever neither hurries or avoids death.

The direct trial of him who would be the greatest poet is today. If he does not flood himself with the immediate age as with vast oceanic tides . . . and if he does not attract his own land body and soul to himself and hang on its neck with incomparable love and plunge his semitic muscle into its merits and demerits . . . and if he be not himself the age transfigured . . . and if to him is not opened the eternity which gives similitude to all periods and locations and processes and animate and inanimate forms, and which is the bond of time, and rises up from its inconceivable vagueness and infiniteness in the swimming shape of today, and is held by the ductile anchors of life, and makes the present spot the passage from what was to what shall be, and commits itself to the representation of this wave of an hour and this one of the sixty beautiful children of the wave—let him merge in the general run and wait his development. . . . Still the final test of poems or any character or work

remains. The prescient poet projects himself centuries ahead and judges performer or performance after the changes of time. Does it live through them? Does it still hold on untired? Will the same style and the direction of genius to similar points be satisfactory now? Has no new discovery in science or arrival at superior planes of thought and judgment and behaviour fixed him or his so that either can be looked down upon? Have the marches of tens and hundreds and thousands of years made willing detours to the right hand and the left hand for his sake? Is he beloved long and long after he is buried? Does the young man think often of him? and the young woman think often of him? and do the middle-aged and the old think of him?

A great poem is for ages and ages in common and for all degrees and complexions and all departments and sects and for a woman as much as a man and a man as much as a woman. A great poem is no finish to a man or woman but rather a beginning. Has any one fancied he could sit at last under some due authority and rest satisfied with explanations and realize and be content and full? To no such terminus does the greatest poet bring . . . he brings neither cessation or sheltered fatness and ease. The touch of him tells in action. Whom he takes he takes with firm sure grasp into live regions previously unattained . . . thenceforward is no rest . . . they see the space and ineffable sheen that turn the old spots and lights into dead vacuums. The companion of him beholds the birth and progress of stars and learns one of the meanings. Now there shall be a man cohered out of tumult and chaos . . . the elder encourages

the younger and shows him how . . . they two shall launch off fearlessly together till the new world fits an orbit for itself and looks unabashed on the lesser orbits of the stars and sweeps through the ceaseless rings and shall never be quiet again.

There will soon be no more priests. Their work is done. They may wait awhile . . . perhaps a generation or two . . . dropping off by degrees. A superior breed shall take their place . . . the gangs of kosmos and prophets en masse shall take their place. A new order shall arise and they shall be the priests of man, and every man shall be his own priest. The churches built under their umbrage shall be the churches of men and women. Through the divinity of themselves shall the kosmos and the new breed of poets be interpreters of men and women and of all events and things. They shall find their inspiration in real objects today, symptoms of the past and future . . . They shall not deign to defend immortality or God or the perfection of things or liberty or the exquisite beauty and reality of the soul. They shall arise in America and be responded to from the remainder of the earth.

The English language befriends the grand American expression . . . it is brawny enough and limber and full enough. On the tough stock of a race who through all change of circumstances was never without the idea of political liberty, which is the animus of all liberty, it has attracted the terms of daintier and gayer and subtler and more elegant tongues. It is the powerful language of resistance . . . it is the dialect of common sense. It is the speech of the proud and melancholy races and of all who aspire. It is the chosen tongue to express

growth faith self-esteem freedom justice equality friendliness amplitude prudence decision and courage. It is the medium that shall well nigh express the inexpressible.

No great literature nor any like style of behaviour or oratory or social intercourse or household arrangements or public institutions or the treatment by bosses of employed people, nor executive detail or detail of the army or navy, nor spirit of legislation or courts or police or tuition or architecture or songs or amusements or the costumes of young men, can long elude the jealous and passionate instinct of American standards. Whether or no the sign appears from the mouths of the people, it throbs a live interrogation in every freeman's and freewoman's heart after that which passes by or this built to remain. Is it uniform with my country? Are its disposals without ignominious distinctions? Is it for the evergrowing communes of brothers and lovers, large, well-united, proud beyond the old models, generous beyond all models? Is it something grown fresh out of the fields or drawn from the sea for use to me today here? I know that what answers for me an American must answer for any individual or nation that serves for a part of my materials. Does this answer? or is it without reference to universal needs? or sprung of the needs of the less developed society of special ranks? or old needs of pleasure overlaid by modern science and forms? Does this acknowledge liberty with audible and absolute acknowledgement, and set slavery at naught for life and death? Will it help breed one goodshaped and wellhung man, and

a woman to be his perfect and independent mate? Does it improve manners? Is it for the nursing of the young of the republic? Does it solve readily with the sweet milk of the nipples of the breasts of the mother of many children? Has it too the old ever-fresh forbearance and impartiality? Does it look with the same love on the last born and those hardening toward stature, and on the errant, and on those who disdain all strength of assault outside of their own?

The poems distilled from other poems will probably pass away. The coward will surely pass away. The expectation of the vital and great can only be satisfied by the demeanor of the vital and great. The swarms of the polished deprecating and reflectors and the polite float off and leave no remembrance. America prepares with composure and goodwill for the visitors that have sent word. It is not intellect that is to be their warrant and welcome. The talented, the artist, the ingenious, the editor, the statesman, the erudite . . . they are not unappreciated . . . they fall in their place and do their work. The soul of the nation also does its work. No disguise can pass on it . . . no disguise can conceal from it. It rejects none, it permits all. Only toward as good as itself and toward the like of itself will it advance half-way. An individual is as superb as a nation when he has the qualities which make a superb nation. The soul of the largest and wealthiest and proudest nation may well go half-way to meet that of its poets. The signs are effectual. There is no fear of mistake. If the one is true the other is true. The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it.

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

1837–1920

REALISM AND THE AMERICAN NOVEL[1]

(1892)

'As for those called critics,' the author [Burke] says, 'they have generally sought the rule of the arts in the wrong place; they have sought among poems, pictures, engravings, statues, and buildings; but art can never give the rules that make an art. This is, I believe, the reason why artists in general, and poets principally, have been confined in so narrow a circle; they have been rather imitators of one another than of nature. Critics follow them, and therefore can do little as guides. I can judge but poorly of anything while I measure it by no other standard than itself. The true standard of the arts is in every man's power; and an easy observation of the most common, sometimes of the meanest, things in nature will give the truest lights, where the greatest sagacity and industry that slights such observation must leave us in the dark, or, what is worse, amuse and mislead us by false lights.'

If this should happen to be true—and it certainly commends itself to acceptance—it might portend an immediate danger to the vested interests of criticism, only that it was written a hundred years ago; and we shall probably have the 'sagacity and

[1] From *Criticism and Fiction*. Copyright 1891, Harper and Brothers; copyright 1918, Mildred Howells and John Mead Howells.

industry that slights the observation' of nature long enough yet to allow most critics the time to learn some more useful trade than criticism as they pursue it. Nevertheless, I am in hopes that the communistic era in taste foreshadowed by Burke is approaching, and that it will occur within the lives of men now overawed by the foolish old superstitution that literature and art are anything but the expression of life, and are to be judged by any other test than that of their fidelity to it. The time is coming, I hope, when each new author, each new artist, will be considered, not in his proportion to any other author or artist, but in his relation to the human nature, known to us all, which it is his privilege, his high duty, to interpret. 'The true standard of the artist is in every man's power' already, as Burke says; Michelangelo's 'light of the piazza', the glance of the common eye, is and always was the best light on a statue; Goethe's 'boys and blackbirds' have in all ages been the real connoisseurs of berries; but hitherto the mass of common men have been afraid to apply their own simplicity, naturalness, and honesty to the appreciation of the beautiful. They have always cast about for the instruction of some one who professed to know better, and who browbeat wholesome common-sense into the self-distrust that ends in sophistication. They have fallen generally to the worst of this bad species, and have been 'amused and misled' (how pretty that quaint old use of amuse is!) 'by the false lights' of critical vanity and self-righteousness. They have been taught to compare what they see and what they read, not with the things that they have observed

and known, but with the things that some other artist or writer has done. Especially if they have themselves the artistic impulse in any direction they are taught to form themselves, not upon life, but upon the masters who became masters only by forming themselves upon life. The seeds of death are planted in them, and they can produce only the still-born, the academic. They are not told to take their work into the public square and see if it seems true to the chance passer, but to test it by the work of the very men who refused and decried any other test of their own work. The young writer who attempts to report the phrase and carriage of every-day life, who tries to tell just how he has heard men talk and seen them look, is made to feel guilty of something low and unworthy by the stupid people who would like to have him show how Shakespeare's men talked and looked, or Scott's, or Thackeray's, or Balzac's, or Hawthorne's, or Dickens's; he is instructed to idealize his personages, that is, to take the life-likeness out of them, and put the book-likeness into them. He is approached in the spirit of the wretched pedantry into which learning, much or little, always decays when it withdraws itself and stands apart from experience in an attitude of imagined superiority, and which would say with the same confidence to the scientist: 'I see that you are looking at a grasshopper there which you found in the grass, and I suppose you intend to describe it. Now don't waste your time and sin against culture in that way. I've got a grasshopper here, which has been evolved at considerable pains and expense out of the grasshopper in general; in fact, it's a type. It's

made up of wire and cardboard, very prettily painted in a conventional tint, and it's perfectly indestructible. It isn't very much like a real grasshopper, but it's a great deal nicer, and it's served to represent the notion of a grasshopper ever since man emerged from barbarism. You may say that it's artificial. Well, it is artificial; but then it's ideal too; and what you want to do is to cultivate the ideal. You'll find the books full of my kind of grasshopper, and scarcely a trace of yours in any of them. The thing that you are proposing to do is commonplace; but if you say that it isn't commonplace, for the very reason that it hasn't been done before, you'll have to admit that it's photographic.'

As I said, I hope the time is coming when not only the artist, but the common, average man, who always 'has the standard of the arts in his power', will have also the courage to apply it, and will reject the ideal grasshopper wherever he finds it, in science, in literature, in art, because it is not 'simple, natural, and honest', because it is not like a real grasshopper. But I will own that I think the time is yet far off, and that the people who have been brought up on the ideal grasshopper, the heroic grasshopper, the impassioned grasshopper, the self-devoted, adventureful, good old romantic card-board grasshopper, must die out before the simple, honest, and natural grasshopper can have a fair field. I am in no haste to compass the end of these good people, whom I find in the mean time very amusing. It is delightful to meet one of them, either in print or out of it—some sweet elderly lady or excellent gentleman whose youth was pastured on the literature of thirty or forty years

ago—and to witness the confidence with which they preach their favorite authors as all the law and the prophets. They have commonly read little or nothing since, or, if they have, they have judged it by a standard taken from these authors, and never dreamed of judging it by nature; they are destitute of the documents in the case of the later writers; they suppose that Balzac was the beginning of realism, and that Zola is its wicked end; they are quite ignorant, but they are ready to talk you down, if you differ from them, with an assumption of knowledge sufficient for any occasion. The horror, the resentment, with which they receive any question of their literary saints is genuine; you descend at once very far in the moral and social scale, and anything short of offensive personality is too good for you; it is expressed to you that you are one to be avoided, and put down even a little lower than you have naturally fallen.

These worthy persons are not to blame; it is part of their intellectual mission to represent the petrifaction of taste, and to preserve an image of a smaller and cruder and emptier world than we now live in, a world which was feeling its way towards the simple, the natural, the honest, but was a good deal 'amused and misled' by lights now no longer mistakable for heavenly luminaries. They belong to a time, just passing away, when certain authors were considered authorities in certain kinds, when they must be accepted entire and not questioned in any particular. Now we are beginning to see and to say that no author is an authority except in those moments when he held his ear close to Nature's lips and caught her very

accent. These moments are not continuous with any authors in the past, and they are rare with all. Therefore I am not afraid to say now that the greatest classics are sometimes not at all great, and that we can profit by them only when we hold them, like our meanest contemporaries, to a strict accounting, and verify their work by the standard of the arts which we all have in our power, the simple, the natural, and the honest.

Those good people, those curious and interesting if somewhat musty back-numbers, must always have a hero, an idol of some sort, and it is droll to find Balzac, who suffered from their sort such bitter scorn and hate for his realism while he was alive, now become a fetich in his turn, to be shaken in the faces of those who will not blindly worship him. But it is no new thing in the history of literature: whatever is established is sacred with those who do not think. At the beginning of the century, when romance was making the same fight against effete classicism which realism is making to-day against effete romanticism, the Italian poet Monti declared that 'the romantic was the cold grave of the Beautiful', just as the realistic is now supposed to be. The romantic of that day and the real of this are in certain degree the same. Romanticism then sought, as realism seeks now, to widen the bounds of sympathy, to level every barrier against aesthetic freedom, to escape from the paralysis of tradition. It exhausted itself in this impulse; and it remained for realism to assert that fidelity to experience and probability of motive are essential conditions of a great imaginative literature. It is not a new theory, but it has never before universally characterized

literary endeavor. When realism becomes false to itself, when it heaps up facts merely, and maps life instead of picturing it, realism will perish too. Every true realist instinctively knows this, and it is perhaps the reason why he is careful of every fact, and feels himself bound to express or to indicate its meaning at the risk of over-moralizing. In life he finds nothing insignificant; all tells for destiny and character; nothing that God has made is contemptible. He cannot look upon human life and declare this thing or that thing unworthy of notice, any more than the scientist can declare a fact of the material world beneath the dignity of his inquiry. He feels in every nerve the equality of things and the unity of men; his soul is exalted, not by vain shows and shadows and ideals, but by realities, in which alone the truth lives. In criticism it is his business to break the images of false gods and misshapen heroes, to take away the poor silly toys that many grown people would still like to play with. He cannot keep terms with Jack the Giant-killer or Puss in Boots, under any name or in any place, even when they reappear as the convict Vautrec, or the Marquis de Montrivaut, or the Sworn Thirteen Noblemen. He must say to himself that Balzac, when he imagined these monsters, was not Balzac, he was Dumas; he was not realistic, he was romantic. . . .

Which brings us again, after this long way about, to the divine Jane and her novels, and that troublesome question about them. She was great and they were beautiful, because she and they were honest, and dealt with nature nearly a hundred years ago

as realism deals with it to-day. Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material, and Jane Austen was the first and the last of the English novelists to treat material with entire truthfulness. Because she did this, she remains the most artistic of the English novelists, and alone worthy to be matched with the great Scandinavian and Slavic and Latin artists. It is not a question of intellect, or not wholly that. The English have mind enough; but they have not taste enough; or, rather, their taste has been perverted by their false criticism, which is based upon personal preference, and not upon principle; which instructs a man to think that what he likes is good, instead of teaching him first to distinguish what is good before he likes it. The art of fiction, as Jane Austen knew it, declined from her through Scott, and Bulwer, and Dickens, and Charlotte Brontë, and Thackeray, and even George Eliot, because the mania of romanticism had seized upon all Europe, and these great writers could not escape the taint of their time; but it has shown few signs of recovery in England, because English criticism, in the presence of the Continental masterpieces, has continued provincial and special and personal, and has expressed a love and a hate which had to do with the quality of the artist rather than the character of his work. It was inevitable that in their time the English romanticists should treat, as Señor Valdés says, 'the barbarous customs of the Middle Ages, softening and disfiguring them, as Walter Scott and his kind did'; that they should 'devote themselves to falsifying nature, refining and subtilizing sentiment, and modifying psychology

after their own fancy', like Bulwer and Dickens, as well as like Rousseau and Madame de Staël, not to mention Balzac, the worst of all that sort at his worst. This was the natural course of the disease; but it really seems as if it were their criticism that was to blame for the rest: not, indeed, for the performance of this writer or that, for criticism can never affect the actual doing of a thing; but for the esteem in which this writer or that is held through the perpetuation of false ideals. The only observer of English middle-class life since Jane Austen worthy to be named with her was not George Eliot, who was first ethical and then artistic, who transcended her in everything but the form and method most essential to art, and there fell hopelessly below her. It was Anthony Trollope who was most like her in simple honesty and instinctive truth, as unphilosophized as the light of common day; but he was so warped from a wholesome ideal as to wish at times to be like the caricaturist Thackeray, and to stand about in his scene, talking it over with his hands in his pockets, interrupting the action, and spoiling the illusion in which alone the truth of art resides. Mainly, his instinct was too much for his ideal, and with a low view of life in its civic relations and a thoroughly bourgeois soul, he yet produced works whose beauty is surpassed only by the effect of a more poetic writer in the novels of Thomas Hardy. Yet if a vote of English criticism even at this late day, when all continental Europe has the light of aesthetic truth, could be taken, the majority against these artists would be overwhelmingly in favor of a writer who had so little artistic sensibility, that he never hesitated on

any occasion, great or small, to make a foray among his characters, and catch them up to show them to the reader and tell him how beautiful or ugly they were; and cry out over their amazing properties.

Doubtless the ideal of those poor islanders will be finally changed. If the truth could become a fad it would be accepted by all their 'smart people', but truth is something rather too large for that; and we must await the gradual advance of civilization among them. Then they will see that their criticism has misled them; and that it is to this false guide they owe, not precisely the decline of fiction among them, but its continued debasement as an art. . . .

I would have our American novelists be as American as they unconsciously can. Matthew Arnold complained that he found no 'distinction' in our life, and I would gladly persuade all artists intending greatness in any kind among us that the recognition of the fact pointed out by Mr. Arnold ought to be a source of inspiration to them, and not discouragement. We have been now some hundred years building up a state on the affirmation of the essential equality of men in their rights and duties, and whether we have been right or been wrong the gods have taken us at our word, and have responded to us with a civilization in which there is no 'distinction' perceptible to the eye that loves and values it. Such beauty and such grandeur as we have is common beauty, common grandeur, or the beauty and grandeur in which the quality of solidarity so prevails that neither distinguishes

itself to the disadvantage of anything else. It seems to me that these conditions invite the artist to the study and the appreciation of the common, and to the portrayal in every art of those finer and higher aspects which unite rather than sever humanity, if he would thrive in our new order of things. The talent that is robust enough to front the every-day world and catch the charm of its work-worn, care-worn, brave, kindly face, need not fear the encounter, though it seems terrible to the sort nurtured in the superstition of the romantic, the bizarre, the heroic, the distinguished, as the things alone worthy of painting or carving or writing. The arts must become democratic, and then we shall have the expression of America in art; and the reproach which Mr. Arnold was half right in making us shall have no justice in it any longer; we shall be 'distinguished'. . . .

One of the great newspapers the other day invited the prominent American authors to speak their minds upon a point in the theory and practice of fiction which had already vexed some of them. It was the question of how much or how little the American novel ought to deal with certain facts of life which are not usually talked of before young people, and especially young ladies. Of course the question was not decided, and I forget just how far the balance inclined in favor of a larger freedom in the matter. But it certainly inclined that way; one or two writers of the sex which is somehow supposed to have purity in its keeping (as if purity were a thing that did not practically concern the other sex, preoccupied with serious affairs) gave it

a rather vigorous tilt to that side. In view of this fact it would not be the part of prudence to make an effort to dress the balance; and indeed I do not know that I was going to make any such effort. But there are some things to say, around and about the subject, which I should like to have some one else say, and which I may myself possibly be safe in suggesting.

One of the first of these is the fact, generally lost sight of by those who censure the Anglo-Saxon novel for its prudishness, that it is really not such a prude after all; and that if it is sometimes apparently anxious to avoid those experiences of life not spoken of before young people, this may be an appearance only. Sometimes a novel which has this shuffling air, this effect of truckling to propriety, might defend itself, if it could speak for itself, by saying that such experiences happened not to come within its scheme, and that, so far from maiming or mutilating itself in ignoring them, it was all the more faithfully representative of the tone of modern life in dealing with love that was chaste, and with passion so honest that it could be openly spoken of before the tenderest society bud at dinner. It might say that the guilty intrigue, the betrayal, the extreme flirtation even, was the exceptional thing in life, and unless the scheme of the story necessarily involved it, that it would be bad art to lug it in, and as bad taste as to introduce such topics in a mixed company. It could say very justly that the novel in our civilization now always addresses a mixed company, and that the vast majority of the company are ladies, and that very many, if not most, of these ladies are young girls. If the novel

were written for men and for married women alone, as in continental Europe, it might be altogether different. But the simple fact is that it is not written for them alone among us, and it is a question of writing, under cover of our universal acceptance, things for young girls to read which you would be put out-of-doors for saying to them, or frankly giving notice of your intention, and so cutting yourself off from the pleasure—and it is a very high and sweet one—of appealing to these vivid, responsive intelligences, which are none the less brilliant and admirable because they are innocent.

One day a novelist who liked, after the manner of other men, to repine at his hard fate, complained to his friend, a critic, that he was tired of the restriction he had put upon himself in this regard; for it is a mistake, as can be readily shown, to suppose that others impose it. 'See how free those French fellows are!' he rebelled. 'Shall we always be shut up to our tradition of decency?'

'Do you think it's much worse than being shut up to their tradition of indecency?' said his friend.

Then that novelist began to reflect, and he remembered how sick the invariable motive of the French novel made him. He perceived finally that, convention for convention, ours was not only more tolerable, but on the whole was truer to life, not only to its complexion, but also to its texture. No one will pretend that there is not vicious love beneath the surface of our society; if he did, the fetid explosions of the divorce trials would refute him; but if he pretended that it was in any just

sense characteristic of our society, he could be still more easily refuted. Yet it exists, and it is unquestionably the material of tragedy, the stuff from which intense effects are wrought. The question, after owning this fact, is whether these intense effects are not rather cheap effects. I incline to think they are, and I will try to say why I think so, if I may do so without offence. The material itself, the mere mention of it, has an instant fascination; it arrests, it detains, till the last word is said, and while there is anything to be hinted. This is what makes a love intrigue of some sort all but essential to the popularity of any fiction. Without such an intrigue the intellectual equipment of the author must be of the highest, and then he will succeed only with the highest class of readers. But any author who will deal with a guilty love intrigue holds all readers in his hand, the highest with the lowest, as long as he hints the slightest hope of the smallest potential naughtiness. He need not at all be a great author; he may be a very shabby wretch, if he has but the courage or the trick of that sort of thing. The critics will call him 'virile' and 'passionate'; decent people will be ashamed to have been limed by him; but the low average will only ask another chance of flocking into his net. If he happens to be an able writer, his really fine and costly work will be unheeded, and the lure to the appetite will be chiefly remembered. There may be other qualities which make reputations for other men, but in his case they will count for nothing. He pays this penalty for his success in that kind; and every one pays some such penalty who deals with some such material. It attaches in

like manner to the triumphs of the writers who now almost form a school among us, and who may be said to have established themselves in an easy popularity simply by the study of erotic shivers and fervors. They may find their account in the popularity, or they may not; there is no question of the popularity.

But I do not mean to imply that their case covers the whole ground. So far as it goes, though, it ought to stop the mouths of those who complain that fiction is enslaved to propriety among us. It appears that of a certain kind of impropriety it is free to give us all it will, and more. But this is not what serious men and women writing fiction mean when they rebel against the limitations of their art in our civilization. They have no desire to deal with nakedness, as painters and sculptors freely do in the worship of beauty; or with certain facts of life, as the stage does, in the service of sensation. But they ask why, when the conventions of the plastic and histrionic arts liberate their followers to the portrayal of almost any phase of the physical or of the emotional nature, an American novelist may not write a story on the lines of Anna Karenina or Madame Bovary. Sappho they put aside, and from Zola's work they avert their eyes. They do not condemn him or Daudet, necessarily, or accuse their motives; they leave them out of the question; they do not want to do that kind of thing. But they do sometimes wish to do another kind, to touch one of the most serious and sorrowful problems of life in the spirit of Tolstoï and Flaubert, and they ask why they may not. At one time, they remind us, the Anglo-Saxon novelist did deal

with such problems—De Foe in his spirit, Richardson in his, Goldsmith in his. At what moment did our fiction lose this privilege? In what fatal hour did the Young Girl arise and seal the lips of Fiction, with a touch of her finger, to some of the most vital interests of life?

Whether I wished to oppose them in their aspiration for greater freedom, or whether I wished to encourage them, I should begin to answer them by saying that the Young Girl had never done anything of the kind. The manners of the novel have been improving with those of its readers; that is all. Gentlemen no longer swear or fall drunk under the table, or abduct young ladies and shut them up in lonely country-houses, or so habitually set about the ruin of their neighbors' wives, as they once did. Generally, people now call a spade an agricultural implement; they have not grown decent without having also grown a little squeamish, but they have grown comparatively decent; there is no doubt about that. They require of a novelist whom they respect unquestionable proof of his seriousness, if he proposes to deal with certain phases of life; they require a sort of scientific decorum. He can no longer expect to be received on the ground of entertainment only; he assumes a higher function, something like that of a physician or a priest, and they expect him to be bound by laws as sacred as those of such professions; they hold him solemnly pledged not to betray them or abuse their confidence. If he will accept the conditions, they give him their confidence, and he may then treat to his greater honor, and not at all to his disadvantage, of such experiences, such relations of men and

women as George Eliot treats in Adam Bede, in Daniel Deronda, in Romola, in almost all her books; such as Hawthorne treats in the Scarlet Letter; such as Dickens treats in David Copperfield; such as Thackeray treats in Pendennis, and glances at in every one of his fictions; such as most of the masters of English fiction have at some time treated more or less openly. It is quite false or quite mistaken to suppose that our novels have left untouched these most important realities of life. They have only not made them their stock in trade; they have kept a true perspective in regard to them; they have relegated them in their pictures of life to the space and place they occupy in life itself, as we know it in England and America. They have kept a correct proportion, knowing perfectly well that unless the novel is to be a map, with everything scrupulously laid down in it, a faithful record of life in far the greater extent could be made to the exclusion of guilty love and all its circumstances and consequences.

I justify them in this view not only because I hate what is cheap and meretricious, and hold in peculiar loathing the cant of the critics who require 'passion' as something in itself admirable and desirable in a novel, but because I prize fidelity in the historian of feeling and character. Most of these critics who demand 'passion' would seem to have no conception of any passion but one. Yet there are several other passions: the passion of grief, the passion of avarice, the passion of pity, the passion of ambition, the passion of hate, the passion of envy, the passion of devotion, the passion of friendship; and all these have a greater part in the

drama of life than the passion of love, and infinitely greater than the passion of guilty love. Wittingly or unwittingly, English fiction and American fiction have recognized this truth, not fully, not in the measure it merits, but in greater degree than most other fiction.

HENRY JAMES

1843–1916

THE ART OF FICTION[1] (1884)

I SHOULD not have fixed so comprehensive a title to these few remarks, necessarily wanting in any completeness upon a subject the full consideration of which would carry us far, did I not seem to discover a pretext for my temerity in the interesting pamphlet lately published under this name by Mr. Walter Besant. Mr. Besant's lecture at the Royal Institution—the original form of his pamphlet—appears to indicate that many persons are interested in the art of fiction, and are not indifferent to such remarks as those who practise it may attempt to make about it. I am therefore anxious not to lose the benefit of this favourable association, and to edge in a few words under cover of the attention which Mr. Besant is sure to have excited. There is something very encouraging in his having put into form certain of his ideas on the mystery of story-telling.

It is a proof of life and curiosity—curiosity on the part of the brotherhood of novelists as well as on the part of their readers. Only a short time ago it might have been supposed that the English novel was not what the French call *discutable*. It had no air of having a theory, a conviction, a consciousness of itself behind it—of being the expression of an artistic faith, the result of choice and comparison.

[1] Reprinted from *Partial Portraits* with the kind permission of the Macmillan Co. Copyright 1888.

I do not say it was necessarily the worse for that: it would take much more courage than I possess to intimate that the form of novel as Dickens and Thackeray (for instance) saw it had any taint of incompleteness. It was, however, *naïf* (if I may help myself out with another French word); and evidently if it be destined to suffer in any way for having lost its *naïveté* it has now an idea of making sure of the corresponding advantages. During the period I have alluded to there was a comfortable good-humoured feeling abroad that a novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and that our only business with it could be to swallow it. But within a year or two, for some reason or other, there have been signs of returning animation—the era of discussion would appear to have been to a certain extent opened. Art lives upon discussion, upon experiment, upon curiosity, upon variety of attempt, upon the exchange of views and the comparison of standpoints; and there is a presumption that those times when no one has anything particular to say about it, and has no reason to give for practice or preference, though they may be times of honour, are not times of development—are times, possibly, even a little of dulness. The successful application of any art is a delightful spectacle, but the theory too is interesting; and though there is a great deal of the latter without the former I suspect there has never been a genuine success that has not had a latent core of conviction. Discussion, suggestion, formulation, these things are fertilizing when they are frank and sincere. Mr. Besant has set an excellent example in saying what he thinks, for his part, about the way in which fiction should

be written, as well as about the way in which it should be published; for his view of the 'art', carried on into an appendix, covers that too. Other labourers in the same field will doubtless take up the argument, they will give it the light of their experience, and the effect will surely be to make our interest in the novel a little more what it had for some time threatened to fail to be—a serious, active, inquiring interest, under protection of which this delightful study may, in moments of confidence, venture to say a little more what it thinks of itself.

It must take itself seriously for the public to take it so. The old superstition about fiction being 'wicked' has doubtless died out in England; but the spirit of it lingers in a certain oblique regard directed toward any story which does not more or less admit that it is only a joke. Even the most jocular novel feels in some degree the weight of the proscription that was formerly directed against literary levity: the jocularity does not always succeed in passing for orthodoxy. It is still expected, though perhaps people are ashamed to say it, that a production which is after all only a 'make-believe' (for what else is a 'story'?) shall be in some degree apologetic—shall renounce the pretension of attempting really to represent life. This, of course, any sensible, wide-awake story declines to do, for it quickly perceives that the tolerance granted to it on such a condition is only an attempt to stifle it disguised in the form of generosity. The old evangelical hostility to the novel, which was as explicit as it was narrow, and which regarded it as little less favourable to our

immortal part than a stage-play, was in reality far less insulting. The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life. When it relinquishes this attempt, the same attempt that we see on the canvas of the painter, it will have arrived at a very strange pass. It is not expected of the picture that it will make itself humble in order to be forgiven; and the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is, so far as I am able to see, complete. Their inspiration is the same, their process (allowing for the different quality of the vehicle) is the same, their success is the same. They may learn from each other, they may explain and sustain each other. Their cause is the same, and the honour of one is the honour of another. The Mahometans think a picture an unholy thing, but it is a long time since any Christian did, and it is therefore the more odd that in the Christian mind the traces (dissimulated though they may be) of a suspicion of the sister art should linger to this day. The only effectual way to lay it to rest is to emphasize the analogy to which I just alluded—to insist on the fact that as the picture is reality, so the novel is history. That is the only general description (which does it justice) that we may give of the novel. But history also is allowed to represent life; it is not, any more than painting, expected to apologize. The subject-matter of fiction is stored up likewise in documents and records, and if it will not give itself away, as they say in California, it must speak with assurance, with the tone of the historian. Certain accomplished novelists have a habit of giving themselves away which must often bring tears to the

eyes of people who take their fiction seriously. I was lately struck, in reading over many pages of Anthony Trollope, with his want of discretion in this particular. In a digression, a parenthesis or an aside, he concedes to the reader that he and this trusting friend are only 'making believe'. He admits that the events he narrates have not really happened, and that he can give his narrative any turn the reader may like best. Such a betrayal of a sacred office seems to me, I confess, a terrible crime; it is what I mean by the attitude of apology, and it shocks me every whit as much in Trollope as it would have shocked me in Gibbon or Macaulay. It implies that the novelist is less occupied in looking for the truth (the truth, of course I mean, that he assumes, the premises that we must grant him, whatever they may be) than the historian, and in doing so it deprives him at a stroke of all his standing-room. To represent and illustrate the past, the actions of men, is the task of either writer, and the only difference that I can see is, in proportion as he succeeds, to the honour of the novelist, consisting as it does in his having more difficulty in collecting his evidence, which is so far from being purely literary. It seems to me to give him a great character, the fact that he has at once so much in common with the philosopher and the painter; this double analogy is a magnificent heritage.

It is of all this evidently that Mr. Besant is full when he insists upon the fact that fiction is one of the *fine* arts, deserving in its turn of all the honours and emoluments that have hitherto been reserved for the successful profession of music, poetry, painting, architecture. It is impossible to insist

too much on so important a truth, and the place that Mr. Besant demands for the work of the novelist may be represented, a trifle less abstractly, by saying that he demands not only that it shall be reputed artistic, but that it shall be reputed very artistic indeed. It is excellent that he should have struck this note, for his doing so indicates that there was need of it, that his proposition may be to many people a novelty. One rubs one's eyes at the thought; but the rest of Mr. Besant's essay confirms the revelation. I suspect in truth that it would be possible to confirm it still further, and that one would not be far wrong in saying that in addition to the people to whom it has never occurred that a novel ought to be artistic, there are a great many others who, if this principle were urged upon them, would be filled with an indefinable mistrust. They would find it difficult to explain their repugnance, but it would operate strongly to put them on their guard. 'Art', in our Protestant communities, where so many things have got so strangely twisted about, is supposed in certain circles to have some vague injurious effect upon those who make it an important consideration, who let it weigh in the balance. It is assumed to be opposed in some mysterious manner to morality, to amusement, to instruction. When it is embodied in the work of the painter (the sculptor is another affair!) you know what it is: it stands there before you, in the honesty of pink and green and a gilt frame; you can see the worst of it at a glance, and you can be on your guard. But when it is introduced into literature it becomes more insidious—there is danger of its hurting you before you know

it. Literature should be either instructive or amusing, and there is in many minds an impression that these artistic preoccupations, the search for form, contribute to neither end, interfere indeed with both. They are too frivolous to be edifying, and too serious to be diverting; and they are moreover priggish and paradoxical and superfluous. That, I think, represents the manner in which the latent thought of many people who read novels as an exercise in skipping would explain itself if it were to become articulate. They would argue, of course, that a novel ought to be 'good', but they would interpret this term in a fashion of their own, which indeed would vary considerably from one critic to another. One would say that being good means representing virtuous and aspiring characters placed in prominent positions; another would say that it depends on a 'happy ending', on a distribution at the last of prizes, pensions, husbands, wives, babies, millions, appended paragraphs, and cheerful remarks. Another still would say that it means being full of incident and movement, so that we shall wish to jump ahead, to see who was the mysterious stranger, and if the stolen will was ever found, and shall not be distracted from this pleasure by any tiresome analysis or 'description'. But they would all agree that the 'artistic' idea would spoil some of their fun. One would hold it accountable for all the description, another would see it revealed in the absence of sympathy. Its hostility to a happy ending would be evident, and it might even in some cases render any ending at all impossible. The 'ending' of a novel is, for many persons, like that of a good dinner, a course of

dessert and ices, and the artist in fiction is regarded as a sort of meddlesome doctor who forbids agreeable aftertastes. It is therefore true that this conception of Mr. Besant's of the novel as a superior form encounters not only a negative but a positive indifference. It matters little that as a work of art it should really be as little or as much of its essence to supply happy endings, sympathetic characters, and an objective tone, as if it were a work of mechanics: the association of ideas, however incongruous, might easily be too much for it if an eloquent voice were not sometimes raised to call attention to the fact that it is at once as free and as serious a branch of literature as any other.

Certainly this might sometimes be doubted in presence of the enormous number of works of fiction that appeal to the credulity of our generation, for it might easily seem that there could be no great character in a commodity so quickly and easily produced. It must be admitted that good novels are much compromised by bad ones, and that the field at large suffers discredit from overcrowding. I think, however, that this injury is only superficial, and that the superabundance of written fiction proves nothing against the principle itself. It has been vulgarized, like all other kinds of literature, like everything else to-day, and it has proved more than some kinds accessible to vulgarization. But there is as much difference as there ever was between a good novel and a bad one: the bad is swept with all the daubed canvases and spoiled marble into some unvisited limbo, or infinite rubbish-yard beneath the back-windows of

the world, and the good subsists and emits its light and stimulates our desire for perfection. As I shall take the liberty of making but a single criticism of Mr. Besant, whose tone is so full of love of his art, I may as well have done with it at once. He seems to me to mistake, in attempting to say so definitely beforehand, what sort of an affair the good novel will be. To indicate the danger of such an error as that has been the purpose of these few pages; to suggest that certain traditions on the subject, applied *a priori*, have already had much to answer for, and that the good health of an art which undertakes so immediately to reproduce life must demand that it be perfectly free. It lives upon exercise, and the very meaning of exercise is freedom. The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel, without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting. That general responsibility rests upon it, but it is the only one I can think of. The ways in which it is at liberty to accomplish this result (of interesting us) strike me as innumerable, and such as can only suffer from being marked out or fenced in by prescription. They are as various as the temperament of man, and they are successful in proportion as they reveal a particular mind, different from others. A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say. The tracing of a line to be followed, of a tone to be taken, of a form to be filled out, is a limitation of

that freedom and a suppression of the very thing that we are most curious about. The form, it seems to me, is to be appreciated after the fact: then the author's choice has been made, his standard has been indicated; then we can follow lines and directions and compare tones and resemblances. Then in a word we can enjoy one of the most charming of pleasures, we can estimate quality, we can apply the test of execution. The execution belongs to the author alone; it is what is most personal to him, and we measure him by that. The advantage, the luxury, as well as the torment and responsibility of the novelist, is that there is no limit to what he may attempt as an executant—no limit to his possible experiments, efforts, discoveries, successes. Here it is especially that he works, step by step, like his brother of the brush, of whom we may always say that he has painted his picture in a manner best known to himself. His manner is his secret, not necessarily a jealous one. He cannot disclose it as a general thing if he would; he would be at a loss to teach it to others. I say this with a due recollection of having insisted on the community of method of the artist who paints a picture and the artist who writes a novel. The painter *is* able to teach the rudiments of his practice, and it is possible, from the study of good work (granted the aptitude), both to learn how to paint and to learn how to write. Yet it remains true, without injury to the *rapprochement*, that the literary artist would be obliged to say to his pupil much more than the other, 'Ah, well, you must do it as you can!' It is a question of degree, a matter of delicacy. If there are exact sciences, there are also exact arts,

and the grammar of painting is so much more definite that it makes the difference.

I ought to add, however, that if Mr. Besant says at the beginning of his essay that the 'laws of fiction may be laid down and taught with as much precision and exactness as the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion', he mitigates what might appear to be an extravagance by applying his remark to 'general' laws, and by expressing most of these rules in a manner with which it would certainly be unaccommodating to disagree. That the novelist must write from his experience, that his 'characters must be real and such as might be met with in actual life'; that 'a young lady brought up in a quiet country village should avoid descriptions of garrison life', and 'a writer whose friends and personal experiences belong to the lower middle-class should carefully avoid introducing his characters into society'; that one should enter one's notes in a common-place book; that one's figures should be clear in outline; that making them clear by some trick of speech or of carriage is a bad method, and 'describing them at length' is a worse one; that English Fiction should have a 'conscious moral purpose'; that 'it is almost impossible to estimate too highly the value of careful workmanship—that is, of style'; that 'the most important point of all is the story', that 'the story is everything': these are principles with most of which it is surely impossible not to sympathize. That remark about the lower middle-class writer and his knowing his place is perhaps rather chilling; but for the rest I should find it difficult to dissent from any one of these recommendations. At the

same time, I should find it difficult positively to assent to them, with the exception, perhaps, of the injunction as to entering one's notes in a commonplace book. They scarcely seem to me to have the quality that Mr. Besant attributes to the rules of the novelist—the 'precision and exactness' of 'the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion'. They are suggestive, they are even inspiring, but they are not exact, though they are doubtless as much so as the case admits of: which is a proof of that liberty of interpretation for which I just contended. For the value of these different injunctions —so beautiful and so vague—is wholly in the meaning one attaches to them. The characters, the situation, which strike one as real will be those that touch and interest one most, but the measure of reality is very difficult to fix. The reality of Don Quixote or of Mr. Micawber is a very delicate shade; it is a reality so coloured by the author's vision that, vivid as it may be, one would hesitate to propose it as a model: one would expose one's self to some very embarrassing questions on the part of a pupil. It goes without saying that you will not write a good novel unless you possess the sense of reality; but it will be difficult to give you a recipe for calling that sense into being. Humanity is immense, and reality has a myriad forms; the most one can affirm is that some of the flowers of fiction have the odour of it, and others have not; as for telling you in advance how your nosegay should be composed, that is another affair. It is equally excellent and inconclusive to say that one must write from experience; to our supposititious aspirant such a declaration might savour of

mockery. What kind of experience is intended, and where does it begin and end? Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility, a kind of huge spider web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness, and catching every air-borne particle in its tissue. It is the very atmosphere of the mind; and when the mind is imaginative—much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius—it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. The young lady living in a village has only to be a damsel upon whom nothing is lost to make it quite unfair (as it seems to me) to declare to her that she shall have nothing to say about the military. Greater miracles have been seen than that, imagination assisting, she should speak the truth about some of these gentlemen. I remember an English novelist, a woman of genius, telling me that she was much commended for the impression she had managed to give in one of her tales of the nature and way of life of the French Protestant youth. She had been asked where she learned so much about this recondite being, she had been congratulated on her peculiar opportunities. These opportunities consisted in her having once, in Paris, as she descended a staircase, passed an open door where, in the household of a *pasteur*, some of the young Protestants were seated at table round a finished meal. The glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but that moment was experience. She had got her direct personal impression, and she turned out her type. She knew what youth was, and what Protestantism; she also had the

advantage of having seen what it was to be French, so that she converted these ideas into a concrete image and produced a reality. Above all, however, she was blessed with the faculty which when you give it an inch takes an ell, and which for the artist is a much greater source of strength than any accident of residence or of place in the social scale. The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it—this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education. If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions *are* experience, just as (have we not seen it?) they are the very air we breathe. Therefore, if I should certainly say to a novice, 'Write from experience and from experience only', I should feel that this was rather a tantalizing monition if I were not careful immediately to add, 'Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost!'

I am far from intending by this to minimize the importance of exactness—of truth of detail. One can speak best from one's own taste, and I may therefore venture to say that the air of reality (solidity of specification) seems to me to be the supreme virtue of a novel—the merit on which all its other merits (including that conscious moral purpose of which Mr. Besant speaks) helplessly and submissively depend. If it be not there they are all as nothing, and if these be there, they owe their effect to the success with which the author has

produced the illusion of life. The cultivation of this success, the study of this exquisite process, form, to my taste, the beginning and the end of the art of the novelist. They are his inspiration, his despair, his reward, his torment, his delight. It is here in very truth that he competes with life; it is here that he competes with his brother the painter in *his* attempt to render the look of things, the look that conveys their meaning, to catch the colour, the relief, the expression, the surface, the substance of the human spectacle. It is in regard to this that Mr. Besant is well inspired when he bids him take notes. He cannot possibly take too many, he cannot possibly take enough. All life solicits him, and to 'render' the simplest surface, to produce the most momentary illusion, is a very complicated business. His case would be easier, and the rule would be more exact, if Mr. Besant had been able to tell him what notes to take. But this, I fear, he can never learn in any manual; it is the business of his life. He has to take a great many in order to select a few, he has to work them up as he can, and even the guides and philosophers who might have most to say to him must leave him alone when it comes to the application of precepts, as we leave the painter in communion with his palette. That his characters 'must be clear in outline', as Mr. Besant says—he feels that down to his boots; but how he shall make them so is a secret between his good angel and himself. It would be absurdly simple if he could be taught that a great deal of 'description' would make them so, or that on the contrary the absence of description and the cultivation of dialogue, or the absence of dialogue and the multi-

plication of 'incident', would rescue him from his difficulties. Nothing, for instance, is more possible than that he be of a turn of mind for which this odd, literal opposition of description and dialogue, incident and description, has little meaning and light. People often talk of these things as if they had a kind of internecine distinctness, instead of melting into each other at every breath, and being intimately associated parts of one general effort of expression. I cannot imagine composition existing in a series of blocks, nor conceive, in any novel worth discussing at all, of a passage of description that is not in its intention narrative, a passage of dialogue that is not in its intention descriptive, a touch of truth of any sort that does not partake of the nature of incident, or an incident that derives its interest from any other source than the general and only source of the success of a work of art—that of being illustrative. A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts. The critic who over the close texture of a finished work shall pretend to trace a geography of items will mark some frontiers as artificial, I fear, as any that have been known to history. There is an old-fashioned distinction between the novel of character and the novel of incident which must have cost many a smile to the intending fabulist who was keen about his work. It appears to me as little to the point as the equally celebrated distinction between the novel and the romance—to answer as little to any reality. There are bad novels and good novels, as there are bad

pictures and good pictures; but that is the only distinction in which I see any meaning, and I can as little imagine speaking of a novel of character as I can imagine speaking of a picture of character. When one says picture one says of character, when one says novel one says of incident, and the terms may be transposed at will. What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? What is either a picture or a novel that is *not* of character? What else do we seek in it and find in it? It is an incident for a woman to stand up with her hand resting on a table and look at you in a certain way; or if it be not an incident I think it will be hard to say what it is. At the same time it is an expression of character. If you say you don't see it (character in *that—allons donc!*), this is exactly what the artist who has reasons of his own for thinking he *does* see it undertakes to show you. When a young man makes up his mind that he has not faith enough after all to enter the church as he intended, that is an incident, though you may not hurry to the end of the chapter to see whether perhaps he doesn't change once more. I do not say that these are extraordinary or startling incidents. I do not pretend to estimate the degree of interest proceeding from them, for this will depend upon the skill of the painter. It sounds almost puerile to say that some incidents are intrinsically much more important than others, and I need not take this precaution after having professed my sympathy for the major ones in remarking that the only classification of the novel that I can understand is into that which has life and that which has it not.

The novel and the romance, the novel of incident and that of character—these clumsy separations appear to me to have been made by critics and readers for their own convenience, and to help them out of some of their occasional predicaments, but to have little reality or interest for the producer, from whose point of view it is of course that we are attempting to consider the art of fiction. The case is the same with another shadowy category which Mr. Besant apparently is disposed to set up—that of the 'modern English novel'; unless indeed it be that in this matter he has fallen into an accidental confusion of standpoints. It is not quite clear whether he intends the remarks in which he alludes to it to be didactic or historical. It is as difficult to suppose a person intending to write a modern English as to suppose him writing an ancient English novel: that is a label which begs the question. One writes the novel, one paints the picture, of one's language and of one's time, and calling it modern English will not, alas! make the difficult task any easier. No more, unfortunately, will calling this or that work of one's fellow-artist a romance—unless it be, of course, simply for the pleasantness of the thing, as for instance when Hawthorne gave this heading to his story of *Blithedale*. The French, who have brought the theory of fiction to remarkable completeness, have but one name for the novel, and have not attempted smaller things in it, that I can see, for that. I can think of no obligation to which the 'romancer' would not be held equally with the novelist; the standard of of execution is equally high for each. Of course it is of execution that we are talking—that being the

only point of a novel that is open to contention. This is perhaps too often lost sight of, only to produce interminable confusions and cross-purposes. We must grant the artist his subject, his idea, his *donnée:* our criticism is applied only to what he makes of it. Naturally I do not mean that we are bound to like it or find it interesting: in case we do not our course is perfectly simple—to let it alone. We may believe that of a certain idea even the most sincere novelist can make nothing at all, and the event may perfectly justify our belief; but the failure will have been a failure to execute, and it is in the execution that the fatal weakness is recorded. If we pretend to respect the artist at all, we must allow him his freedom of choice, in the face, in particular cases, of innumerable presumptions that the choice will not fructify. Art derives a considerable part of its beneficial exercise from flying in the face of presumptions, and some of the most interesting experiments of which it is capable are hidden in the bosom of common things. Gustave Flaubert has written a story about the devotion of a servant-girl to a parrot, and the production, highly finished as it is, cannot on the whole be called a success. We are perfectly free to find it flat, but I think it might have been interesting; and I, for my part, am extremely glad he should have written it; it is a contribution to our knowledge of what can be done—or what cannot. Ivan Turgénieff has written a tale about a deaf and dumb serf and a lap-dog, and the thing is touching, loving, a little masterpiece. He struck the note of life where Gustave Flaubert missed it—he flew in the face of a presumption and achieved a victory.

Nothing, of course, will ever take the place of the good old fashion of 'liking' a work of art or not liking it: the most improved criticism will not abolish that primitive, that ultimate test. I mention this to guard myself from the accusation of intimating that the idea, the subject, of a novel or a picture, does not matter. It matters, to my sense, in the highest degree, and if I might put up a prayer it would be that artists should select none but the richest. Some, as I have already hastened to admit, are much more remunerative than others, and it would be a world happily arranged in which persons intending to treat them should be exempt from confusions and mistakes. This fortunate condition will arrive only, I fear, on the same day that critics become purged from error. Meanwhile, I repeat, we do not judge the artist with fairness unless we say to him, 'Oh, I grant you your starting-point, because if I did not I should seem to prescribe to you, and heaven forbid I should take that responsibility. If I pretend to tell you what you must not take, you will call upon me to tell you then what you must take; in which case I shall be prettily caught. Moreover, it isn't till I have accepted your data that I can begin to measure you. I have the standard, the pitch; I have no right to tamper with your flute and then criticize your music. Of course I may not like your idea at all; I may think it silly, or stale, or unclean; in which case I wash my hands of you altogether. I may content myself with believing that you will not have succeeded in being interesting, but I shall, of course, not attempt to demonstrate it, and you will be as indifferent to me as I am to you. I needn't

remind you that there are all sorts of tastes: who can know it better? Some people, for excellent reasons, don't like to read about carpenters; others, for reasons even better, don't like to read about courtesans. Many object to Americans. Others (I believe they are mainly editors and publishers) won't look at Italians. Some readers don't like quiet subjects; others don't like bustling ones. Some enjoy a complete illusion, others the consciousness of large concessions. They choose their novels accordingly, and if they don't care about your idea they won't, *a fortiori*, care about your treatment.'

So that it comes back very quickly, as I have said, to the liking: in spite of M. Zola, who reasons less powerfully than he represents, and who will not reconcile himself to this absoluteness of taste, thinking that there are certain things that people ought to like, and that they can be made to like. I am quite at a loss to imagine anything (at any rate in this matter of fiction) that people *ought* to like or to dislike. Selection will be sure to take care of itself, for it has a constant motive behind it. That motive is simply experience. As people feel life, so they will feel the art that is most closely related to it. This closeness of relation is what we should never forget in talking of the effort of the novel. Many people speak of it as a factitious, artificial form, a product of ingenuity, the business of which it is to alter and arrange the things that surround us, to translate them into conventional, traditional moulds. This, however, is a view of the matter which carries us but a very short way, condemns the art to an eternal repetition of a few

familiar *clichés*, cuts short its development, and leads us straight up to a dead wall. Catching the very note and trick, the strange irregular rhythm of life, that is the attempt whose strenuous force keeps Fiction upon her feet. In proportion as in what she offers us we see life *without* rearrangement do we feel that we are touching the truth; in proportion as we see it *with* rearrangement do we feel that we are being put off with a substitute, a compromise and convention. It is not uncommon to hear an extraordinary assurance of remark in regard to this matter of rearranging, which is often spoken of as if it were the last word of art. Mr. Besant seems to me in danger of falling into the great error with his rather unguarded talk about 'selection'. Art is essentially selection, but it is a selection whose main care is to be typical, to be inclusive. For many people art means rose-coloured window-panes, and selection means picking a bouquet for Mrs. Grundy. They will tell you glibly that artistic considerations have nothing to do with the disagreeable, with the ugly; they will rattle off shallow commonplaces about the province of art and the limits of art till you are moved to some wonder in return as to the province and the limits of ignorance. It appears to me that no one can ever have made a seriously artistic attempt without becoming conscious of an immense increase—a kind of revelation—of freedom. One perceives in that case—by the light of a heavenly ray—that the province of art is all life, all feeling, all observation, all vision. As Mr. Besant so justly intimates, it is all experience. That is a sufficient answer to those who maintain that it must not touch the sad things of life,

who stick into its divine unconscious bosom little prohibitory inscriptions on the end of sticks, such as we see in public gardens—'It is forbidden to walk on the grass; it is forbidden to touch the flowers; it is not allowed to introduce dogs or to remain after dark; it is requested to keep to the right.' The young aspirant in the line of fiction whom we continue to imagine will do nothing without taste, for in that case his freedom would be of little use to him; but the first advantage of his taste will be to reveal to him the absurdity of the little sticks and tickets. If he have taste, I must add, of course he will have ingenuity, and my disrespectful reference to that quality just now was not meant to imply that it is useless in fiction. But it is only a secondary aid; the first is a capacity for receiving straight impressions.

Mr. Besant has some remarks on the question of 'the story' which I shall not attempt to criticize, though they seem to me to contain a singular ambiguity, because I do not think I understand them. I cannot see what is meant by talking as if there were a part of a novel which is the story and part of it which for mystical reasons is not—unless indeed the distinction be made in a sense in which it is difficult to suppose that any one should attempt to convey anything. 'The story', if it represents anything, represents the subject, the idea, the *donnée* of the novel; and there is surely no 'school'—Mr. Besant speaks of a school—which urges that a novel should be all treatment and no subject. There must assuredly be something to treat; every school is intimately conscious of that. This sense of the story being the idea, the starting-

point, of the novel, is the only one that I see in which it can be spoken of as something different from its organic whole; and since in proportion as the work is successful the idea permeates and penetrates it, informs and animates it, so that every word and every punctuation-point contribute directly to the expression, in that proportion do we lose our sense of the story being a blade which may be drawn more or less out of its sheath. The story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and thread, and I never heard of a guild of tailors who recommended the use of the thread without the needle, or the needle without the thread. Mr. Besant is not the only critic who may be observed to have spoken as if there were certain things in life which constitute stories, and certain others which do not. I find the same odd implication in an entertaining article in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, devoted, as it happens, to Mr. Besant's lecture. 'The story is the thing!' says this graceful writer, as if with a tone of opposition to some other idea. I should think it was, as every painter who, as the time for 'sending in' his picture looms in the distance, finds himself still in quest of a subject—as every belated artist not fixed about his theme will heartily agree. There are some subjects which speak to us and others which do not, but he would be a clever man who should undertake to give a rule—an index expurgatorius—by which the story and the no-story should be known apart. It is impossible (to me at least) to imagine any such rule which shall not be altogether arbitrary. The writer in the *Pall Mall* opposes the delightful (as I suppose) novel of *Margot la Balafrée* to certain tales

in which 'Bostonian nymphs' appear to have 'rejected English dukes for psychological reasons'. I am not acquainted with the romance just designated, and can scarcely forgive the *Pall Mall* critic for not mentioning the name of the author, but the title appears to refer to a lady who may have received a scar in some heroic adventure. I am inconsolable at not being acquainted with this episode, but am utterly at a loss to see why it is a story when the rejection (or acceptance) of a duke is not, and why a reason, psychological or other, is not a subject when a cicatrix is. They are all particles of the multitudinous life with which the novel deals, and surely no dogma which pretends to make it lawful to touch the one and unlawful to touch the other will stand for a moment on its feet. It is the special picture that must stand or fall, according as it seems to possess truth or to lack it. Mr. Besant does not, to my sense, light up the subject by intimating that a story must, under penalty of not being a story, consist of 'adventures'. Why of adventures more than of green spectacles? He mentions a category of impossible things, and among them he places 'fiction without adventure'. Why without adventure, more than without matrimony, or celibacy, or parturition, or cholera, or hydropathy, or Jansenism? This seems to me to bring the novel back to the hapless little *rôle* of being an artificial, ingenious thing—bring it down from its large, free character of an immense and exquisite correspondence with life. And what *is* adventure when it comes to that, and by what sign is the listening pupil to recognize it? It is an adventure—an immense one—for me to write this

little article; and for a Bostonian nymph to reject an English duke is an adventure only less stirring, I should say, than for an English duke to be rejected by a Bostonian nymph. I see dramas within dramas in that, and innumerable points of view. A psychological reason is, to my imagination, an object adorably pictorial; to catch the tint of its complexion—I feel as if that idea might inspire one to Titianesque efforts. There are few things more exciting to me, in short, than a psychological reason, and yet, I protest, the novel seems to me the most magnificent form of art. I have just been reading, at the same time, the delightful story of *Treasure Island*, by Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, and, in a manner less consecutive, the last tale from M. Edmond de Goncourt, which is entitled *Chérie*. One of these works treats of murders, mysteries, islands of dreadful renown, hairbreadth escapes, miraculous coincidences, and buried doubloons. The other treats of a little French girl who lived in a fine house in Paris, and died of wounded sensibility because no one would marry her. I call *Treasure Island* delightful, because it appears to me to have succeeded wonderfully in what it attempts; and I venture to bestow no epithet upon *Chérie*, which strikes me as having failed deplorably in what it attempts—that is, in tracing the development of the moral consciousness of a child. But one of these productions strikes me as exactly as much of a novel as the other, and as having a 'story' quite as much. The moral consciousness of a child is as much a part of life as the islands of the Spanish Main, and the one sort of geography seems to me to have those 'surprises' of which Mr. Besant

speaks quite as much as the other. For myself (since it comes back in the last resort, as I say, to the preference of the individual), the picture of the child's experience has the advantage that I can at successive steps (an immense luxury, near to the 'sensual pleasure' of which Mr. Besant's critic in the *Pall Mall* speaks) say Yes or No, as it may be, to what the artist puts before me. I have been a child in fact, but I have been on a quest for a buried treasure only in supposition, and it is a simple accident that with M. de Goncourt I should have for the most part to say No. With George Eliot, when she painted that country with a far other intelligence, I always said Yes.

The most interesting part of Mr. Besant's lecture is unfortunately the briefest passage—his very cursory allusion to the 'conscious moral purpose' of the novel. Here again it is not very clear whether he be recording a fact or laying down a principle; it is a great pity that in the latter case he should not have developed his idea. This branch of the subject is of immense importance, and Mr. Besant's few words point to considerations of the widest reach, not to be lightly disposed of. He will have treated the art of fiction but superficially who is not prepared to go every inch of the way that these considerations will carry him. It is for this reason that at the beginning of these remarks I was careful to notify the reader that my reflections on so large a theme have no pretension to be exhaustive. Like Mr. Besant, I have left the question of the morality of the novel till the last, and at the last I find I have used up my space. It is a question surrounded with difficulties, as witness the very first that meets us,

in the form of a definite question, on the threshold. Vagueness, in such a discussion, is fatal, and what is the meaning of your morality and your conscious moral purpose? Will you not define your terms and explain how (a novel being a picture) a picture can be either moral or immoral? You wish to paint a moral picture or carve a moral statue: will you not tell us how you would set about it? We are discussing the Art of Fiction; questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution; questions of morality are quite another affair, and will you not let us see how it is that you find it so easy to mix them up? These things are so clear to Mr. Besant that he has deduced from them a law which he sees embodied in English Fiction, and which is 'a truly admirable thing and a great cause for congratulation'. It is a great cause for congratulation indeed when such thorny problems become as smooth as silk. I may add that in so far as Mr. Besant perceives that in point of fact English Fiction has addressed itself preponderantly to these delicate questions he will appear to many people to have made a vain discovery. They will have been positively struck, on the contrary, with the moral timidity of the usual English novelist; with his (or with her) aversion to face the difficulties with which on every side the treatment of reality bristles. He is apt to be extremely shy (whereas the picture that Mr. Besant draws is a picture of boldness), and the sign of his work, for the most part, is a cautious silence on certain subjects. In the English novel (by which of course I mean the American as well), more than in any other, there is a traditional difference between that which people

know and that which they agree to admit that they know, that which they see and that which they speak of, that which they feel to be a part of life and that which they allow to enter into literature. There is the great difference, in short, between what they talk of in conversation and what they talk of in print. The essence of moral energy is to survey the whole field, and I should directly reverse Mr. Besant's remark and say not that the English novel has a purpose, but that it has a diffidence. To what degree a purpose in a work of art is a source of corruption I shall not attempt to inquire; the one that seems to me least dangerous is the purpose of making a perfect work. As for our novel, I may say lastly on this score that as we find it in England to-day it strikes me as addressed in a large degree to 'young people', and that this in itself constitutes a presumption that it will be rather shy. There are certain things which it is generally agreed not to discuss, not even to mention, before young people. That is very well, but the absence of discussion is not a symptom of the moral passion. The purpose of the English novel—'a truly admirable thing, and a great cause for congratulation'—strikes me therefore as rather negative.

There is one point at which the moral sense and the artistic sense lie very near together; that is in the light of the very obvious truth that the deepest quality of a work of art will always be the quality of the mind of the producer. In proportion as that intelligence is fine will the novel, the picture, the statue partake of the substance of beauty and truth. To be constituted of such elements is, to my vision, to have purpose enough. No good novel

will ever proceed from a superficial mind; that seems to me an axiom which, for the artist in fiction, will cover all needful moral ground: if the youthful aspirant take it to heart it will illuminate for him many of the mysteries of 'purpose'. There are many other useful things that might be said to him, but I have come to the end of my article, and can only touch them as I pass. The critic in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, whom I have already quoted, draws attention to the danger, in speaking of the art of fiction, of generalizing. The danger that he has in mind is rather, I imagine, that of particularizing, for there are some comprehensive remarks which, in addition to those embodied in Mr. Besant's suggestive lecture, might without fear of misleading him be addressed to the ingenuous student. I should remind him first of the magnificence of the form that is open to him, which offers to sight so few restrictions and such innumerable opportunities. The other arts, in comparison, appear confined and hampered; the various conditions under which they are exercised are so rigid and definite. But the only condition that I can think of attaching to the composition of the novel is, as I have already said, that it be sincere. This freedom is a splendid privilege, and the first lesson of the young novelist is to learn to be worthy of it. 'Enjoy it as it deserves,' I should say to him; 'take possession of it, explore it to its utmost extent, publish it, rejoice in it. All life belongs to you, and do not listen either to those who would shut you up into corners of it and tell you that it is only here and there that art inhabits, or to those who would persuade you that this heavenly messenger wings her way outside of life

altogether, breathing a superfine air, and turning away her head from the truth of things. There is no impression of life, no manner of seeing it and feeling it, to which the plan of the novelist may not offer a place; you have only to remember that talents so dissimilar as those of Alexandre Dumas and Jane Austen, Charles Dickens and Gustave Flaubert have worked in this field with equal glory. Do not think too much about optimism and pessimism; try and catch the colour of life itself. In France to-day we see a prodigious effort (that of Émile Zola, to whose solid and serious work no explorer of the capacity of the novel can allude without respect), we see an extraordinary effort, vitiated by a spirit of pessimism on a narrow basis. M. Zola is magnificent, but he strikes an English reader as ignorant; he has an air of working in the dark; if he had as much light as energy, his results would be of the highest value. As for the aberrations of a shallow optimism, the ground (of English fiction especially) is strewn with their brittle particles as with broken glass. If you must indulge in conclusions, let them have the taste of a wide knowledge. Remember that your first duty is to be as complete as possible—to make as perfect a work. Be generous and delicate and pursue the prize.'

LEWIS E. GATES

1860–1924

IMPRESSIONISM AND APPRECIATION [1]

(1900)

PURE impressionism in literary criticism has of late years grown into great favour, both among critics themselves and with the public. The essentials of a good critic—so the rubric has come to run—are sensitiveness to the varying appeal of art, and the ability to translate this appeal into images and phrases. The impressionist must have delicacy of perception, mobility of mood, reverence for the shade, and a sure instinct for the specific integrating phrase, and for the image tinged with feeling.

The popular legend that places Matthew Arnold at the head of this critical tradition in England is at least partly true; he certainly cared more for the shade and sought more patiently to define it, than any earlier English critic. The cult of the shade was one of the many good things that came to him from France. But Arnold the critic was no match for Arnold the foe of Philistinism. Though he had early insisted on the need of detachment in literary criticism, Arnold suffered his moods to be perturbed and his temperament to be blurred by worry over practical and public questions of the hour; and in later years he grew so intent on coaching his fellow-countrymen in morals and religion as to lose in some degree his critical zest for refine-

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ments that had no direct ethical value. It is rather to Walter Pater among English essayists that the modern impressionist looks for precept and example in his search for disinterestedness, for artistic sincerity, and for flexibleness of temperament; and it is Pater who, more than all other English critics, has illustrated what appreciative criticism may accomplish.

Yet if we consider the matter more carefully, impressionism is neither Arnold's nor Pater's importation or invention. It is the result of far deeper influences than any one man could have put in play. It is indeed the expression in literature of certain spiritual tendencies that have long been developing,—tendencies the growth of which may be traced in man's relation to nature as well as to art. And it is because the moods and the instincts and the methods of impressionism may thus be discovered working themselves out connectedly and progressively in the history of the human spirit, that they must be regarded as justifying themselves, and as deserving from even the most conservative judges some degree of recognition and acceptance. Little by little, during the last two centuries, the human spirit has gained a finer and closer sense of the worth and meaning of every individual moment of pleasure in the presence alike of nature and of art. The record of this increase of sensitiveness toward nature is to be found in poetry, and toward art in criticism.

Thomson's *Seasons* may be taken as representing the utmost sensitiveness to nature of which the early eighteenth century was capable. Even for a modern reader, Thomson's descriptions still have

considerable charm; but what such a reader soon notes is that the effects Thomson portrays are all generalized effects, grouped significantly under the names of the four seasons. Typical spring, typical summer, and so on—these Thomson portrays, and of these he feels what may be called the generalized emotional value. Beyond this typical treatment of nature and these generalized emotions he does not pass. As we go on, however, through the poetry of the century, nature becomes gradually more localized; poets dare to mark with specific detail—to picture vividly—individual objects, and they feel, and set down in their verse, the general charm that *this* landscape, *this* smiling valley, or *this* brimming river, has for an impressionable observer. Cowper has thus recorded much of the beauty of the valley of the Ouse, with delicate truth and finished art. Yet, be it noted, he has included in his record little or no suggestion of his own peculiar momentary moods. In Wordsworth and the Romantic poets, the impressions of nature are still further defined—are individualized both in place and in time; at last we have 'the time and the place and the loved one all together'. Continually, in Romantic poetry, a special bit of nature, tinged with the colour of a fleeting mood, is enshrined in verse; the fusion of nature with man's spirit is relatively complete.

In criticism, too,—that is, in man's conscious relation to *art*,—a similar growth in sensitiveness and in concreteness of matter and mood may be traced. Addison was the first to try to work out, in his *Pleasures of the Imagination*, the psychology of artistic enjoyment; and his papers on *Paradise Lost* come nearer being patient and vital appreciа-

tion of literature than any earlier English criticism comes. Yet, after all, they get little beyond a conventional and general classification of impressions. Addison's words of praise and blame are few, literal, abstract, colourless. 'Just', 'natural', 'elegant', 'beautiful', 'wonderfully beautiful and poetical'—these words and phrases, and others like them, are used again and again; and rarely indeed does Addison escape from such tagging generalities, and define a personal impression vividly and imaginatively. The history of literary criticism from Addison's day to our own is, if viewed in one way, the history of the ever-increasing refinement of the critic's sensorium; it is the history of the critic's increasing sensitiveness to delicate shades of spiritual experience in his reaction on literature; and finally, it is the history of a growing tendency on the part of the critic to value, above all else, his own intimate personal relation to this or that piece of literature—a tendency that more and more takes the form of prizing the fleeting mood, the passing poignant moment of enjoyment in the presence of art, until at last certain modern critics refuse, on principle, to feel twice alike about the same poem. In short, what has occurred is this: a poem in its relation to the critic has been gradually carried over from the outside world and made an intimate part of the critic's personality; it has been transformed from an external object, loosely related to universal mind and generalized emotion of which the critic stands as type, into a series of thought-waves and nerve-vibrations that run at a special moment through an active brain and a sensitive temperament. For the pre-Addisonian critic, a

poem was something to be scanned and handled, like an exquisite casket, and to be praised in general terms for its conventional design, its ingenious setting of jewel-like ornaments, and its sure and skilful execution; for the modern impressionistic critic, it is like the tone of a dear voice, like the breath of early morning, like any intangible greeting that steals across the nerves and cherishes them with an intimately personal appeal.

Impressionism, then, justifies itself historically. But more than this, it justifies itself psychologically; for it recognizes with peculiar completeness the vitalizing power of literature—its fashion of putting into play the whole nature of each reader it addresses and its consequent, unlimited, *creative* energy. A piece of scientific writing offers to every man the same studiously unequivocal message; as far as the writer is consistently scientific, his terms have only an intellectual value, put only the mind into play, and guide all minds through the same routine of syllogism and inference to an inevitable conclusion. In contrast with this uniformity in the appeal of science is the infinite variableness and adaptability of literature. Every piece of literature is a mimic piece of life that tempts the reader to capture from it, with mind and heart and imagination, an individual bliss; he may, in some measure, shape it as he will—work out his own destiny with it. A theorem from Euclid once mastered is one and the same thing to every man—perennially monotonous. A play of Shakespeare's (or, for that matter, a sonnet of Rossetti's) speaks a language that varies in its power and suggestion according to the personality of the hearer, and even according

to his mood; the poem gets its value, as life gets its value, from the temperament that confronts it; and it is this enchanting fickleness in literature that of late years impressionism has been more and more noting and illustrating, until some critics, like M. Anatole France, assure us that literary criticism is nothing, and should be nothing, but the recital of one's personal adventures with a book.

It is a mistake, then, to protest against the growth of impressionism, as some nervous guardians of the public literary conscience are inclined to protest, as if a parasitic form of literature were creeping into undue importance. Regarded as literature about literature, impressionism may seem an overrefined product—two degrees removed from actual life, fantastically unreal; but regarded as the intimate record of what a few happy moments have meant to an alert mind and heart, impressionism is transcendently close to fact. The popularity of impressionism is only one sign more that we are learning to prize, above most things else, richness of spiritual experience. The sincere and significant mood—this is what we have come to care for, whether the mood be suggested by life, by nature, or by art and literature. False moods expressed maladroitly will doubtless try to get themselves accepted, just as artificial poems about nature have multiplied endlessly since Wordsworth's day. The counterfeit merely proves the worth of the original. In an age that has learned to look on art with conscious sincerity, and to recognize that the experience offered in art rivals religious experience in renovating and stimulating power, there must more and more come to be an imaginative literature that

takes its inspiration direct from art; of such imaginative literature critical impressionistic writing is one of the most vital forms.

But though impressionistic writing may, as literature, not only justify itself, but prove to be sincerely expressive of some of the most original tendencies of the modern mind, the case is somewhat different when such writing is considered as literary criticism pure and simple, and is cross-questioned as to whether or no it can do the work that has hitherto been exacted of literary criticism. Some French critic, perhaps M. Jules Lemaître, has been accused of turning an essay on a volume of Renan's *Histoire des origines du christianisme* into a lyrical recital of his own boyish delights with a Noah's ark. Instances enough of such critical waywardness must have fallen under every one's eye who keeps the run of current essay-work. Sainte-Beuve long ago said of Taine that in criticizing an author he was apt to pull all the blankets to his own side of the bed. And what was true of Taine, because of his devotion to theory, is true of many modern critics, because of their wilfulness and caprice—or, to put the matter more sympathetically, because of their overruling delight in their own sensibility and impressionableness; they care for themselves more than for their author. When such egoism goes with genius and with artistic resource, the resulting essays justify themselves, because they reveal in fascinating wise new phases of the ever-varying spiritual consciousness of the age. But even in such cases, where a really original personality, under the chance stimulus of literature, flashes out at us winning and imaginatively sugges-

tive glimpses of itself, it may be doubted whether the essay that results is, properly speaking, criticism. Nor is this doubt a mere quibble over terms. The doubt involves several serious questions as regards the nature of a work of art and the critic's proper mode of approach to art. Paradoxical folk have sometimes asserted that what is best worth while in a work of art is what the author never meant to put in it, and that the superlative act of the critic is to find in a work of art for the delight of modern temperaments some previously unsuspected implication of beauty. Paradoxes aside, how much truth is there in this conception of the critic's task? and how much truth in the conception that goes with it of the essentially relative and variable character of art? We may grant that a piece of writing is *literature*, providing it is a beautiful and significant revelation of personality, whether the nerve-vibrations that it utters take their start from life or nature or art. But is such a piece of writing *criticism* if in commenting on a work of art it wilfully neglects its intended value as conceived in the mind of the original artist and as expressing, at least in part, the genius of the age whose life he shared? Can *criticism* properly neglect this original pleasure-value in a work of art? Can it furthermore neglect that permanent and deeply enwrought pleasure, involved in a work of art, through which it has always ministered and will always minister to normal human nature? Can *criticism* properly confine itself to the record of a momentary shiver across a single set of possibly degenerate nerves?

Surely, there is something objective in a work of art even when the work of art is regarded simply

and solely as potential pleasure; and surely it is part of the task of the critic to take this objective character into full consideration. Unless he does so, his appreciation of the work will not be properly critical; nor indeed, for that matter, will his appreciation gather the full measure of personal delight that the work of art offers him. Just here lies the distinction between whimsical impressionism—which may be literature, very delightful literature, but lacks the perspective essential to criticism—and vital appreciation, which is indeed criticism in its purest and most suggestive form.

A work of art is a permanent incarnation of spiritual energy waiting for release. Milton long ago called a good book 'the precious life-blood of a master-spirit stored up on purpose to a life beyond life'. We nowadays may go even farther than this, and find treasured up in a piece of literature certain definite blisses and woes and flashes of insight that once went thrilling through a special temperament and mind. The most recent psychological explanations of artistic creation [1] concern themselves continually with the feelings of the artist; they trace out minutely the ways in which through the play of the artist's feelings a work of art is instinctively and surely generated. The poet concentrates his thought on some concrete piece of life, on some incident, character, or bit of personal experience; because of his emotional temperament, this concentration of interest stirs in him a quick play of feeling and prompts the swift concurrence of many images. Under the incitement of these feelings, and

[1] See, for example, Professor Dilthey's *Die Einbildungskraft des Dichters.*

in accordance with laws of association that may at least in part be described, these images grow bright and clear, take definite shapes, fall into significant groupings, branch and ramify, and break into sparkling mimicry of the actual world of the senses —all the time delicately controlled by the poet's conscious purpose and so growing intellectually significant, but all the time, if the work of art is to be vital, impelled also in their alert weaving of patterns by the moods of the poet, by his fine instinctive sense of the emotional expressiveness of this or that image that lurks in the background of his consciousness. For this intricate web of images, tinged with his most intimate moods, the poet through his intuitive command of words finds an apt series of sound-symbols and records them with written characters. And so a poem arises through an exquisite distillation of personal moods into imagery and into language, and is ready to offer to all future generations its undiminishing store of spiritual joy and strength.

But it is not merely the poet's own spiritual energy that goes into his poem. The spirit of the age—if the poem include much of life in its scope, if it be more than a lyric—enters also into the poem, and moulds it and shapes it, and gives it in part its colour and emotional cast and intellectual quality. In every artist there is a definite mental bias, a definite spiritual organization and play of instincts, which results in large measure from the common life of his day and generation, and which represents this life—makes it potent—within the individuality of the artist. This so-called 'acquired constitution of the life of the soul'—it has been

described by Professor Dilthey with noteworthy acuteness and thoroughness—determines in some measure the contents of the artist's mind, for it determines his interests, and therefore the sensations and perceptions that he captures and automatically stores up. It guides him in his judgments of worth, in his instinctive likes and dislikes as regards conduct and character, and controls in large measure the play of his imagination as he shapes the action of his drama or epic and the destinies of his heroes. Its prejudices interfiltrate throughout the molecules of his entire moral and mental life, and give to each image and idea some slight shade of attractiveness or repulsiveness, so that when the artist's spirit is at work under the stress of feeling, weaving into the fabric of a poem the competing images and ideas in his consciousness, certain ideas and images come more readily and others lag behind, and the resulting work of art gets a colour and an emotional tone and suggestions of value that subtly reflect the genius of the age. Thus it is that into a work of art there creeps a prevailing sort of spiritual energy that may be identified as also operating throughout the social life of the time, and as finding its further expressions in the precepts and the parables of the moralist, in the statecraft of the political leader, in the visionary dreams of the prophet and priest, and, in short, in all the various ideals, mental, moral, and social, that rule the age.

Now, as for the impressionistic writer about literature—he is apt to concern himself very little with this historical origin of a work of art. In dealing with the poetry of a long past age, he will

very likely refuse the hard task of 'trundling back his soul' two hundred or two thousand years and putting himself in close sympathy with the people of an earlier period. He is apt to take a poem very much as he would take a bit of nature—as a pretty play of sound or imagery upon the senses; and he may, indeed, capture through this half-sensuous treatment of art, a peculiar, though wayward, delight. But the appreciative critic is not content with this. He is, to be sure, well aware that his final enjoyment of a poem of some earlier age will be a far subtler and richer experience than would be the mere repetition of the pleasures that the poem gave its writer; that his enjoyment will have countless overtones and undertones that could not have existed for the producer of the poem or for its original hearers. But he also believes that the generating pleasures that produced the work of art, and that once thrilled in a single human spirit, in response to the play and counter-play upon him of the life of his time, must remain permanently the central core of energy in the work of art; and that only as he comes to know those pleasures with fine intimacy, can he conjure out of the work of art its perfect acclaim of delight for now and here.

Therefore the appreciative critic makes use of the historical method in his study of literature. He does not use this method as the man of science uses it, for the final purpose of understanding and explaining literature as a mass of sociological facts governed by fixed laws. This rationalization of literature is not his chief concern, though he may pass this way on his journey to his special goal. But he is persuaded that in all the art and all the

literature that reach the present out of the past, spirit speaks to spirit across a vast gulf of time; that he can catch the precise quality of one of these voices that come down the years only through the aid of delicate imaginative sympathy with the life of an elder generation; and that he can develop to certainty of response this divining sympathy only through patient and loyal study of the peculiar play of the powers that built up in the minds and the imaginations of those earlier men their special vision of earth and heaven.

Difficult and elusive indeed are the questions he must ask himself about the art from a distant age, if he is to be sure of just the quality of the pleasure that went into its creation. If it be Greek art that he seeks to appreciate, he will study and interpret it as the expression of the spirit of Greek life, of a spirit that lived along the nerves and fibres of an entire social organism, of a spirit that sprung from the unconscious depths of instinct, out of which slowly bodied themselves forth conscious purposes and clear ideals, and that penetrated and animated all fashions and forms of belief and behaviour, and gave them their colour and shape and rhythm. He will trace out and capture the quality of this spirit as it expressed itself in the physical life of the Greeks, in their social customs, in their weaving of scientific systems, in their worship of nature, and in the splendid intricacies of their religious ritual and mysteries. And so he will hope to gain at last a sure sense of the peculiar play of energy that found release in some one of their poems, or in the marble or bronze of a hero or a god.

But the universal element in the poetry of an

age by no means completes the objective character of the feeling the poetry has treasured for the delight of later times. In the case of all poetry not communal in its origin, the pleasure involved in a poem was generated in the consciousness of a single artist, and had a definite quality that partook of his individuality. Therefore the appreciative critic has a further nice series of identifications before him in his ideal search for the delight that inheres in a poem. Just what was the innermost nature of the poet who appeals to us in it, often so pathetically, down through the perilous ways of time? What was the special vision of life that he saw and felt the thrill of? What were the actual rhythms of the quicksilver passion in his veins? What was the honeydew on which he fed? What was the quintessential pleasure that he, among all men of his day, distilled into his verse?

Fantastic or insoluble these questions may seem unless with regard to poets about whom we have the closest personal memoranda. Yet critics have now and then answered such questions with surprising insight, even in the case of poets the gossip of whose lives is wholly unknown to us, and whose form of art was least personal in its revelations. Professor Dowden's grouping of Shakespeare's plays in accordance with the prevailing spiritual tone-colour of each and the moods toward life that are imaginatively uttered—moods of debonair light-heartedness, of rollicking jollity, of despairing pessimism, or of luminous golden-tempered comprehension—is an admirable example of the possible intimate interpretation of a poet's varying emotions as treasured in his art.

Here, then, are suggested two ways in which the appreciative critic who would make his impression of a work of art something more than a superficial momentary irritation of pleasure and pain will contrive to direct the play of his spiritual energy. He will realize, as far as he can, the primal vital impulse that wrought out the work of art; he will, in appreciating a poem, discover and recreate in his own soul the rhythms of delight with which the poem vibrated for the men of the age whose life the poem uttered; and he will also discern and realize those actual moods, those swift counter-changes of feeling, which once, in a definite place and at a definite moment, within the consciousness of a single artist evoked images and guided them into union, charged them with spiritual power, and called into rhythmical order sound-symbols to represent them henceforth for ever.

But it must at once be noted that this mimetic enjoyment is after all only the beginning of that process of vitalization by which an appreciative critic wins from a work of art its entire store of delight. The mood of the modern critic is something far subtler than any mere repetition of the mood of the original creative artist; it contains in itself a complexity and a richness of suggestion and *motifs* that correspond to all the gains the human spirit has made since the earlier age. Indeed, these subtle spiritual differences begin to declare themselves the moment the critic tries to describe the earlier enjoyment enshrined in a work of art. Walter Pater, for example, in noting in his essay on Winckelmann, the serene equipoise in Greek art between man's spirit and his body, at once

involuntarily sets over against this mood the later mood in which spirit usurps and so tyrannizes over matter in its exaction of expression as to distort the forms of art, and render them 'pathetic'. No such contrast as this was present in the mind of the Greek as he enjoyed his own art; nor any contrast with a hungry, over-subtle intellectualism, such as nowadays makes the modern consciousness anxious for the individualizing accurate detail and the motley effects of realism. Yet these contrasts and others like them are part of the very essence of our modern delight in the freedom and largeness and calm strength of Greek art. Perhaps the Greek had more zest in his art than we have in it; but his enjoyment certainly had not the luxurious intricacy and the manifold implications of our enjoyment.

Always, then, in the complete appreciation of a work of art there is this superimposition of other moods upon the mood of the creative artist—there is a reinforcement of the original effect by the delicate interfusion of new tones and strains of feeling. Often this is as if harmonies once written for a harpsichord were played upon a modern piano whose 'temperament' has been made rich and expressive through the artful use and adjustment of all possible overtones. We shall be able to draw from the music new shades of meaning and beauty. But the original chords—those we should scrupulously repeat; and the original tone-colour, too, it were well to have at least in memory. If a critic will win from early Florentine painting—from the work, for example, of Fra Lippo Lippi—its innermost value for the modern temperament, he will first recover imaginatively the sincere religious

impulse and the naïve religious faith, as well as the dawning delight in the opening possibilities of a new art, which animated those early painters. He will try to catch the very mood that underlies the tender mystic wistfulness of Lippo Lippi's Madonnas, and that gives them their soft and luminous constraint in the midst of the eager adoration of shepherd boys and attending angels. He will recognize this mood as perhaps all the more appealing because of the quaint incompleteness of the artist's technique, his loyal archaic awkwardness, his religious formalism and symbolism, his unsure perspective, all the tantalizing difficulties of execution through which his vision of beauty made its way into colour and form. This mood will define itself for the critic through the aid of many nicely modulated contrasts—through contrast, it may be, with the more shadowed and poignantly mysterious Madonnas of Botticelli, and with the splendid and victorious womanhood of Titian's Madonnas, with the gentle and terrestrial grace of motherhood in those of Andrea del Sarto, and with the sweetly ordered comeliness of Van Dyck's Madonnas. But above all, it will define itself through contrast with our modern mood toward the Madonna and the religious ideas she symbolizes—through contrast with our sophisticated reverie, our hardly won half-credence, and our wise, pathetic insight. And through this contrast the earlier mood will gain for us a certain poignancy of delight; for the mood will come to us as something restored as by miracle out of the otherwise irrecoverable past of the spirit —out of the past of that spirit whose wayfaring through passions of aspiration and joy, and through

drear times of sadness and desolation, was *our* wayfaring, since we have gathered into ourselves all the usufruct of it:—

> Oh! what is this that knows the road I came,
> The flame turned cloud, the cloud returned to flame,
> The lifted, shifted steeps and all the way?

The appreciative critic, then, should know the characteristic joy of every generation of men, and the special joy of each individual artist. He is to be a specialist in historic delight, as the poet is a specialist in the joys of his own day and generation. And therefore in trying to make real to the men of his own time the special bliss that an older work of art contains for them, the appreciative critic will not be content, as is the impressionistic critic, with interpreting it in terms of some chance wayward mood. He will wish to relumine and make potent all that is emotionally vital in the work of art; he will capture again its original quality; he will revive imaginatively those moments of bliss in the history of the human spirit which are closely akin to this bliss and which yet vary from it finely, and moments, too, that contrast broadly and picturesquely with it, all the moments, indeed, which his divining instinct directs him toward, as fit to throw into relief by contrast what is quintessential in this one moment of spiritual ardour. Thus he will try to offer to the men of his own day a just appreciation of the peculiar joy that, in the passage of years, the human spirit has stored up for itself in this record of one of its earlier phases of experience.

Throughout all his patient search for the precise quality of a work of art, the critic will, of course,

make wise use of the science of aesthetics. Its analyses and principles are supposed to reveal and sum up in terse formulas the mystery of beauty, and they should therefore offer the critic a means of steadying himself into a sincerely sympathetic and uneccentric report of the special charm that lurks in a work of art. Yet it must at once be noted that for the appreciative critic the whole region of aesthetics is full of danger. Aesthetic theorizing has been the pet pastime of many callous and horney-eyed philosophers, whose only knowledge of beauty has come by hearsay. Nothing worse can happen to a critic than to be caught in the meshes of such thinkers' *a priori* theories, so much depends on the critic's keeping an intimately vital relation to the art of which he will interpret the peculiar power. Of recent years, however, the science of aesthetics has been rescued from the region of metaphysics, and has been brought very close to fact and made very real and suggestive through the use of psychological methods of study. The peculiar genius of the artist has been analyzed and described; the characteristics of his temperament have been noted with the nicest loyalty; and particularly the play of his special faculty, the imagination, as this faculty through the use of sensations and images and moods and ideas creates a work of art, has been followed out with the utmost delicacy of observation by such acute and sensitive analysts as M. Gabriel Séailles, M. Michaut, and Professor Dilthey. The behaviour, too, of the mind that is enjoying a work of art—this has been minutely studied and described; the 'effects' and the 'impressions' have been recorded by such

masters of silvery instruments for weighing a fancy and measuring a motive as Fechner. The relations between all these impressions and effects and the form and content of a work of art have been tabulated. And so the science of aesthetics has become a really vital record of what may be called the mind's normal behaviour both in the creation and in the enjoyment of art.

The expert critic must some time or other have followed out all these devious analyses and tracked out the intricate workings both of the typical artist's and of the typical appreciator's mind. Such an abstract initiation will have quickened his powers of perception in numberless ways, will have made him alive to countless signs and suggestions in a work of art that might otherwise have appealed to him in vain, and above all will serve to steady him against extravagance and grotesque caprice in appreciation. In these analyses and principles he has the sensitive record of a consensus of expert opinion on the nature of artistic enjoyment—its causes and varieties. Through the help of these canons he may guard against meaningless egoism; he may manœuvre wisely within the region of the normal; he may keep within measurable distance of the tastes and the temperaments of his fellows. He will be able to test his impressions, to judge of their relative importance, to restrain personal whim within bounds, and to remain sanely true to the predominating interests of the normal human mind.

Not that the critic will let his use of aesthetic formulas and points of view conventionalize or stereotype his treatment of art. If he be happily individual and alert, he will refuse to have forced

upon him a system, a method, unalterable preconceptions, or habitual modes of approach to art. He will keep in his repeated encounters with a work of art much of the dilettante's bright wilfulness and fickleness. He will go to it in all moods and all weathers, will wait upon its good pleasure, and will note delightedly all its fleeting aspects. But these stray impressions will not content him, nor will he care to report them as of themselves forming a valid and final appreciation. He will play the pedant with himself; he will, in sober moments of wise hypocrisy, test the worth of his impressions by approved and academic standards; and he will scrutinize them in the light of those canons which the best modern theorizers in things aesthetic have worked out psychologically. He will select and arrange and make significant and unify. And so, while approaching a work of art unconventionally and communing with it intimately, he will, in commenting on it, keep his casual and personal sense of its charm within limits, and be intent on doing full justice to what the work of art may well mean to the normal man in normal moods.

Moreover, this aesthetic initiation will reveal to the critic one special sort of pleasure stored in a work of art that the layman is peculiarly apt to miss—the pleasure that may be won from tracing out the artist's mastery of technique and the secrets of his victorious execution. Here, again, the critic, if he is to make the work of art give up its quintessential quality, must call the historical method to his aid. An artist who, at any moment in the history of art, wishes to express his vision of beauty through the medium and the technique of his

special art, whether it be painting, or music, or poetry, always confronts a definite set of limiting conditions. He finds certain fashions prevailing in his art; he finds in vogue certain conventional ways of treating material; he finds certain fixed forms offering themselves for his use—forms like the sonata and the concerto in music, or like the sonnet and the drama in poetry. These forms are traditional, have various laws and regulations attached to their handling, and in a sense limit the freedom of the artist, require him to make certain concessions, force him to conceive his material in stereotyped ways, and to cast it in predetermined moulds. An artist has always to find out for himself how far he can use these old forms; how far he can limit himself advantageously through accepting old conventions, whether his peculiar vision of beauty can be fully realized within the limits of the established technique, or whether he must be an innovator.

There is a curious and exquisite pleasure to be won from watching artists at close quarters with technical problems of this sort, and from observing the fine certainty with which genius gets the better of technical difficulties, through accepting a convention here, through following a fashion there, through slightly or even audaciously altering received forms or modes to secure scope for novel moods or hitherto unattained effects. An artist's vital relation to the past of his art—this is something that, as it shows itself here and there in his work, the sensitive and alert critic finds keen pleasure in detecting. Here, again, the critic's specialized temperament and knowledge mediate

between the art of earlier times and the men of his own day, and reveal through the help of aesthetics and history the peculiar pleasure with which art has, consciously or unconsciously, been charged.

Finally, the critic must bear in mind that it is distinctly for the men of his own day that he is revitalizing art; that it is for them that his specialized temperament is to use its resources. Every age, some one has said, must write its own literary criticism; and this holds specially true of appreciative criticism. The value of a work of art depends on what it finds in the consciousness to which it appeals; and because individuality is deeper and richer now than it has ever been before, and because the men of to-day are 'the heirs of the ages', and have 'ransacked the ages and spoiled the climes', a great traditional work of art ought to have a richer, more various, more poignant value for modern men than it had for their predecessors. Even in the matter of sense-perceptions this progress is noticeable. 'Our forefathers', says a recent essayist on M. Claude Monet, 'saw fewer tones and colours than we; they had, in fact, a simpler and more naïve vision; the modern eye is being educated to distinguish a complexity of shades and varieties of colour before unknown.' If there has been this increase of delicate power even in a slowly changing physical organ, far greater have been the increase and diversification of sensitiveness in the region of spiritual perception. New facts and ideas have been pouring into the national consciousness from the physical sciences during the last half-century, tending to transform in countless subtle ways man's sense of his own place in the universe, his ideals of

brotherhood, of justice, of happiness, and his orientation toward the Unseen. The half-mystical control that has of late years been won over physical forces, the increased speed with which news flies from country to country, the cheap and swift modes of travel from land to land which break down the barriers between the most widely divergent civilizations—all these influences are reacting continually on the life of the spirit, are stirring men's minds to new thoughts and new moods, and developing in them new aptitudes and new powers. For minds thus changed and thus touched into new alertness and sensitiveness, past art must take on new phases, reveal in itself new suggestions, and acquire or lose stimulating power in manifold ways. These alterations of value the appreciative critic ought to feel and transcribe.

And therefore the critic's must not be a 'cloistered virtue'; at least imaginatively, he must be in sympathy with the whole life of his time. He must be intimately aware of its practical aims and preoccupations, of its material strivings, of all the busy play of its social activities, of its moral and religious perturbations, even of its political intrigues. Doubtless Matthew Arnold was right when he insisted on 'detachment' as the first requisite of good criticism. But in urging detachment, Arnold meant simply that the critic must not let himself become the victim of practical problems or party organizations; that he must not let his imagination be seized upon by a set of definite ideas that are at once to be realized in fact; that he must not become an intellectual or moral or political bigot or a mere Tory or Radical advocate—the one-idea'd cham-

pion of a programme. The critic must have much of the dilettante's fine irresponsibility, perhaps even something of the cynic's amused aloofness from the keen competitions of daily life. But he must also have the dilettante's infinite variety, his intense dramatic curiosity, and his alert, wide-ranging vision. He should know the men of his own day through and through in all their tastes and tempers, and should be even more sensitively aware than they are themselves of their collective prejudices. So he should deepen his personality and as far as possible include within it whatever is most characteristic of his age. In the terms of all this, as well as of his own fleeting moods, he will try to appreciate past art. And so he will become, in very truth, the specialized temperament of the moment, interpreting the past to the present.

Continually, then, in his search for the pleasure involved in a work of art, the critic finds that he must go outside the work of art and go beyond his own momentary state of consciousness; he must see the work of art in its relations to larger and larger groups of facts; and he can charm out of it its true quality only by interpreting its sensations and images and rhythms as expressing something far greater than themselves, and as appealing to something far more permanent than his own fleeting moods. He must put the work of art in its historical setting; he must realize it in its psychological origin; he must conceive of it as one characteristic moment in the development of the human spirit, and in order thus to vitalize it he must be aware of it in its contrasting relations with other characteristic moments and phases of this develop-

ment; and, finally, he must be alive to its worth as a delicately transparent illustration of aesthetic law. In regarding the work of art under all these aspects, his aim is primarily not to explain and not to judge or dogmatize, but to enjoy; to realize the manifold charm the work of art has gathered into itself from all sources, and to interpret this charm imaginatively to the men of his own day and generation.

GEORGE EDWARD WOODBERRY

1855–1930

MAN AND THE RACE[1] (1905)

It belongs to a highly developed race to become, in a true sense, aristocratic—a treasury of its best in practical and spiritual types, and then to disappear in the surrounding tides of men. So Athens dissolved like a pearl in the cup of the Mediterranean, and Rome in the cup of Europe, and Judaea in the cup of the Universal Communion. Though death is the law of all life, man touches this earthen fact with the wand of the spirit, and transforms it into the law of sacrifice. Man has won no victory over his environment so sublime as this, finding in his mortal sentence the true choice of the soul and in the road out of Paradise the open highway of eternal life. Races die; but the ideal of sacrifice as the highest race-destiny has seldom occurred to men, though it has been suggested both by devout Jews and by devout Irishmen as the divinely appointed organic law of the Hebrew and the Celt. In the general view of men the extinction of a race partakes of the unreasoning finality of nature.

The vital flow of life has this in common with disease—that it is self-limited; the fever runs its course, and burns away. 'All thoughts, all passions, all delights,' have this history. In the large arcs of social being, movements of the human spirit, how-

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ever embracing and profound, obey the same law of the limitation of specific energy. Revolutions, reforms, re-births exhaust their fuel, and go out. Races are only greater units of man; for a race, as for an individual, there is a time to die; and that time, as history discloses it, is the moment of perfection. This is the largest fact in the moral order of the world; it is the centre of providence in history. In the life of the human spirit the death of the best of its achieving elements, in the moment of their consummation, is as the fading of the flower of the field or the annual fall of the leaves of the forest in the natural world; and unless this be a sacrificial death, it were wantonness and waste like the deaths of nature; but man and his works are supernatural, and raised above nature by an imperishable relation which they contain. Race-history is a perpetual celebration of the Mass. The Cross initials every page with its broad gold, and he whose eye misses that letter has lost the clue to the meaning. I do not refer to the self-devotion of individuals, the sacred lives of the race. I speak of the involuntary element in the life of nations, or what seems such on the vast scale of social life. Always some great culture is dying to enrich the soil of new harvests, some civilization is crumbling to rubbish to be the hill of a more beautiful city, some race is spending itself that a lower and barbarous world may inherit its stored treasure-house. Although no race may consciously devote itself to the higher ends of mankind, it is the prerogative of its men of genius so to devote it; nor is any nation truly great which is not so dedicated by its warriors and statesmen, its saints and heroes, its

thinkers and dreamers. A nation's poets are its true owners; and by the stroke of the pen they convey the title-deeds of its real possessions to strangers and aliens.

This dedication of the energy of a race by its men of genius to the higher ends of mankind is the sap of all the world. The spiritual life of mankind spreads, the spiritual unity of mankind grows, by this age-long surrender of privilege and power into the hands of the world's new men, and the leavening of the mass by the best that has anywhere arisen in it, which is thus brought about. The absorption of aristocracies in democracies, the dissolution of the nobler product in inferior environments, the salutary death of cultures, civilizations, breeds of men, is the strict line on which history, drawing the sundered parts of the earth slowly together, moves to that great consummation when the best that has at any time been in the world shall be the portion of every man born into it. If the old English blood, which here on this soil gave birth to a nation, spread civilization through it, and cast the orbit of its starry course in time, is destined to be thus absorbed and lost in the nation which it has formed, we should be proud and happy in such a fate; for this is to wear the seal of God's election in history. Nay, if the aristocracy of the whole white race is so to melt in a world of the coloured races of the earth, I for one should only rejoice in such a divine triumph of the sacrificial idea in history; for it would mean the humanization of mankind.

Unless this principle is strongly grasped, unless there be an imperishable relation in man and his

works which they contain, and which, though it has other phases, here appears in this eternal salvage stored up in a slowly perfecting race, history through its length and breadth is a spectacle to appall and terrify the reason. The perpetual flux of time—

> Sceptres, tiaras, swords, and chains, and tomes
> Of reasoned wrong, glozed on by ignorance—

is a mere catastrophe of blood and error unless its mighty subverting and dismaying changes are related to something which does not pass away with dethroned gods, abandoned empires and repealed codes of law and morals. But in the extinction of religions, in imperial revolutions, in the bloody conflict of ideas, there is one thing found stable; it is the mind itself, growing through ages. That which in its continuity we call the human spirit, abides. Men, tribes, states disappear, but the race-mind endures. A conception of the world and an emotional response thereto constitute the life of the race-mind, and fill its consciousness with ideas and feelings, but in these there is no element of chance, contingency or frailty; they are master-ideas, master-emotions, clothed with the power of a long reign over men, and imposing themselves upon each new generation, almost with the yoke of necessity. What I designate as the race-mind —the sole thing permanent in history—is this potentiality of thought and feeling, in any age, realizing itself in states of mind and habits of action long established in the race, deeply inherited, and slowly modified. The race-mind is the epitome of the past. It contains all human energy, knowledge,

experience, that survives. It is the resultant of millions of lives whose earthly power it stores in one deathless force.

This race-mind is simply formed. Life presents certain permanent aspects in the environment, which generate ways of behaviour thereto, normal and general among men. The world is a multiplicity, a harvest-field, a battle-ground; and thence arises through human contact ways of numbering, or mathematics, ways of tillage, or agriculture, ways of fighting, or military tactics and strategy, and these are incorporated in individuals as habits of life. The craftsman has the mind of his craft. Life also presents certain other permanent internal aptitudes in the soul, whence arises the mind of the artist, the inventor, the poet. But this cast of mind of the mathematician or of the painter is rather a phase of individual life. In the larger unit of the race, environment and aptitude working together in the historic life of ages develop ideas, moods and energies characteristic of the race in which they occur. In the sphere of ideas, freedom is indissolubly linked with the English, righteousness with the Hebrew; in the temperamental sphere, a signal instance is the Celtic genius—mystery, twilight, supernatural fantasy, lamentation, tragic disaster—or the Greek genius, definiteness, proportioned beauty, ordered science, philosophic principle; and, in the sphere of energy, land and gold hunger, and that strange soul-hunger—hunger to possess the souls of men—which is at the root of all propagandism, have been motive powers in many races.

Thus, in one part or another of time and place,

and from causes within and without, the race, coming to its best, flowers in some creative hope, ripens in some shaping thought, glows in some resistless enthusiasm. Each of these in its own time holds an age in its grasp. They seize on men and shape them in multitudes to their will, as the wind drives the locusts; make men hideous ascetics, send them on forlorn voyages, devote them to the block and the stake, make Argonauts, Crusaders, Lollards of them, fill Europe in one age with a riot of revolution and in the next with the camps of tyrannic power. These ideas, moods, energies have mysterious potency; they seem to possess an independent being; though, like all the phenomena of life-energy they are self-limited, the period of their growth, culmination and decline extends through generations and centuries; they seem less the brood of man's mind than higher powers that feed on men. They are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses—fanatics, martyrs, dupes; they doom whole peoples to glory or shame; in the undying battle of the soul they are the choosers of the slain. Though they proceed from the human spirit, they rule it; and in life they are the spiritual presences which are most closely unveiled to the apprehension, devotion and love of men.

The race-mind building itself from immemorial time out of this mystery of thought and passion, as generation after generation kneels and fights and fades, takes unerringly the best that anywhere comes to be in the world, holds to it with the cling of fate, and lets all else fall to oblivion; out of this best it has made, and still fashions, that enduring world of idea and emotion into which we

are born as truly as into the natural world. It has a marvellous economy.

> One accent of the Holy Ghost
> The heedless world has never lost.

Egypt, India, Greece and Rome, Italy, the English, France, America, the Turk, the Persian, the Russian, the Japanese, the Chinese, the Negro feed its pure tradition of what excellence is possible to the race-mind, and has grown habitual in its being; and, as in the old myth, it destroys its parent, abolishing all these differences of climate, epoch and skull. The race-mind unifies the race which it preserves; that is its irresistible line of advance. It wipes out the barriers of time, language and country. It undoes the mischief of Babel, and restores to mankind one tongue in which all things can be understood by all men. It fuses the Bibles of all nations in one wisdom and one practice. It knocks off the tribal fetters of caste and creed; and, substituting thought for blood as the bond of the world, it slowly liberates that free soul, which is one in all men and common to all mankind. To free the soul in the individual life, and to accomplish the unity of mankind—that is its work.

To share in this work is the peculiar and characteristic office of literature. This fusion of the nations of the earth, this substitution of the thought-tie for the blood-tie, this enfranchisement of the soul, is its chief function; for literature is the organ of the race-mind. That is why literature is immortal. Though man's inheritance is bequeathed in many ways—the size and shape of

the skull, the physical predisposition of the body, oral tradition, monumental and artistic works, institutions—civilization ever depends in an increasing degree upon literature both for expression and tradition; and whatever other forms the race-mind may mould itself into, literature is its most universal and comprehensive form. That is why literature is the great conservator of society. It shares in the life of the race-mind, partakes of its nature, as language does of thought, corresponds to it accurately, duplicates it, is its other-self. It is through literature mainly that we know the race-mind, and come to possess it; for though the term may seem abstract, the thing is real. Men of genius are great in proportion as they share in it, and national literatures are great in proportion as they embody and express it. Brunetière, the present critic of France, has recently announced a new literary formula. He declares that there is a European literature, not the combined group of national literatures, but a single literature common to European civilization, and that national literatures in their periods of culmination, are great in proportion as they coincide for the time being with this common literature, feed it, and, one after another taking the lead, create it. The declaration is a gleam of self-consciousness in the unity of Europe. How slowly the parts of a nation recognize the integrity of their territory and the community of their interests is one of the constant lessons of history; the Greek confederation, the work of Alfred or of Bismarck, our own experience in the Revolutionary period illustrate it; so the unity of Europe is still half-obscure and dark, though

Catholicism, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Revolution in turn flashed this unity forth, struggling to realize itself in the common civilization. The literature of Europe is the expression of this common genius—the best that man has dreamed or thought or done, has found or been, in Europe—now more brilliant in one capital, now in another as the life ebbs from state to state, and is renewed; for, though it fail here or there, it never ceases. This is the burning of the race-mind, now bright along the Seine, the Rhine and the Thames, as once by the Ganges and the Tiber. The true unity of literature, however, does not lie in the literature of Europe or of India or of antiquity, or in any one manifestation, but in that world-literature which is the organ of the race-mind in its entire breadth and wholeness. The new French formula is a brilliant application, novel, striking and arresting, of the old and familiar idea that civilization in its evolution in history is a single process, continuous, advancing and integral, of which nations and ages are only the successive phases. The life of the spirit in mankind is one and universal, burns with the same fires, moves to the same issues, joins in a single history; it is the race-mind realizing itself cumulatively in time, and mainly through the inheriting power of great literature.

I have developed this conception of the race-mind at some length because it is a primary idea. The nature of literature, and the perspective and interaction of particular literatures, are best comprehended in its light. I emphasize it. The world-literature, national literatures, individual men of genius, are what they are by virtue of sharing in

the race-mind, appropriating it and identifying themselves with it; and what is true of them, on the great scale and in a high degree, is true also of every man who is born into the world. A man is a man by participating in the race-mind. Education is merely the process by which he enters it, avails himself of it, absorbs it. In the things of material civilization this is plain. All the callings of men, arts, crafts, trades, sciences, professions, the entire round of practical life, have a body of knowledge and method of work which are like gospel and ritual to them; apprentice, journeyman and master are the stages of their career; and if anything be added, from life to life, it is on a basis of ascertained fact, of orthodox doctrine and fixed practice. I suppose technical education is most uniform, and by definiteness of aim and economy of method is most efficient; and in the professions as well as in the arts and crafts competition places so high a premium on knowledge and skill that the mastery of all the past can teach is compulsory in a high degree. Similarly, in society, the material unities such as those which commerce, manufacturing, banking establish and spread, are soonest evident and most readily accepted; so true is this that the peace of the world is rather a matter of finance than of Christianity. These practical activities and the interests that spring out of them lie in the sphere of material civilization; but the race-mind, positive, enduring and beneficent as it is in that sphere, is there parcelled out and individualized, and gives a particular and almost private character to man and classes of men, and it seeks a material good. There is another and spiritual

sphere in which the soul which is one and the same in all men comes to self-knowledge, has its training, and achieves its mastery of the world. Essential, universal manhood is found only here; for it is here that the race-mind, by participation in which a man is a man, enfranchizes the soul and gives to it the citizenship of the world. Education in the things of the spirit is often vague in aim and may seem wasteful in method, and it is not supported by the thrust and impetus of physical need and worldly hope; but it exists in all men in some measure, for no one born in our civilization is left so savage, no savage born in the wild is left so primitive but that he holds a mental attitude, however obscure, toward nature, man and God, and has some discipline, however initial, in beauty, love and religion. These things lie in the sphere of the soul. It is, nevertheless, true that the greatest inequalities of condition exist here, and not in that part of life where good is measured by the things of fortune. The difference between the outcast and the millionaire is as nothing to that between the saint and the criminal, the fool and the knower, the boor and the poet. It is a blessing in our civilization, and one worthy of the hand of Providence, that if in material things justice be a laggard and disparities of condition be hard to remedy, the roads to church and school are public highways, free to all. This charter of free education in the life of the soul, which is the supreme opportunity of an American life, is an open door to the treasury of man's spirit. There whosoever will shall open the book of all the world, and read and ponder, and shall enter the common mind of man which is there contained and

avail of its wisdom and absorb its energies into his own and become one with it in insight, power and hope, and ere he is aware shall find himself mingling with the wisest, the holiest, the loveliest, as their comrade and peer. He shall have poet and sage to sup with him, and their meal shall be the bread of life.

What, then, is the position of the youth—of any man whose infinite life lies before him—at his entrance on this education, on this attempt to become one with the mind of the race? and, to neglect the material side of life, what is the process by which he begins to live in the spirit, and not as one new-born, but even in his youth sharing in the wisdom and disciplined power of a soul that has lived through all human ages—the soul of mankind? We forget the beginnings of life; we forget first sensation, first action, and the unknown magic by which, as the nautilus builds its shell, we built out of these early elements this world of the impalpable blue walls, the ocean and prairie floors, and star-sown space, each one of us for ourselves. There is a thought, which I suppose is a commonplace and may be half-trivial, but it is one that took hold of me in boyhood with great tenacity, and stirred the sense of strangeness and marvel in life; the idea that all I knew or should ever know was through something that had touched my body. The ether-wave envelopes us as the ocean, and in that small surface of contact is the sphere of sensibility—of light, sound, and the rest—out of which arises the world which each one of us perceives. It seems a fantastic conception, but it is a true one. For me the idea seemed to shrink the world to the dark envelope of my own body. It served, how-

ever, to initiate me in the broader conception that the soul is the centre, and that life—the world—radiates from it into the enclosing infinite. Wordsworth, you remember, in his famous image of our infancy presents the matter differently; for him the infant began with the infinite, and boy and man lived in an ever narrowing world, a contracting prison, like that fabled one of the Inquisition, and in the end life became a thing common and finite:

> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing boy,
> But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
> He sees it in his joy:
> . . . . . .
> At length the man perceives it die away,
> And fade into the light of common day.

This was never my own conception, nor do I think it is natural to many men. On the contrary, life is an expansion. The sense of the larger world comes first, perhaps, in those unremembered years when the sky ceases to be an inverted bowl, and lifts off from the earth. The experience is fixed for me by another half-childish memory, the familiar verses of Tom Hood in which he describes his early home. You will recall the almost nursery rhymes:

> I remember, I remember
> The fir-trees dark and high;
> I used to think their slender tops
> Were close against the sky;
> It was a childish ignorance,
> But now 'tis little joy
> To know I'm farther off from Heaven
> Than when I was a boy.

Sentiment in the place of philosophy, the thought is the same as Wordsworth's, but the image is natural and true. The noblest image, however, that sets forth the spread of the world, is in that famous sonnet by an obscure poet, Blanco White, describing the first time that the sun went down in Paradise:

Mysterious night! when our first parent knew
Thee from report divine, and heard thy name,
Did he not tremble for this lovely frame,
This glorious canopy of light and blue?
Yet, 'neath the curtain of translucent dew,
Bathed in the rays of the great setting flame,
Hesperus with the host of heaven came,
And lo! creation widened in man's view.

The theory of Copernicus and the voyage of Columbus are the great historical moments of such change in the thoughts of men. As travel thus discloses the amplitude of the planet and science fills the infinite of space for the learning mind, history in its turn peoples the 'dark background and abysm of time'. But more marvellous than the unveiling of time and space, is that last revelation which unlocks the inward world of idea and emotion, and gives solidity to life as by a third dimension. It is this world which is the realm of imaginative literature; scarcely by any other interpreter shall a man come into knowledge of it with any adequacy; and here the subject draws to a head, for it is by the operation of literature in this regard that the race-mind takes possession of the world.

We are plunged at birth *in medias res*, as the phrase is, into the midst of things—into a world already old, of old ideas, old feelings, old experience, that has drunk to the lees the wisdom of the

preacher of Ecclesiastes, and renews in millions of lives the life that has been lived a million times; a world of custom and usage, of immemorial habits, of causes prejudged, of insoluble problems, of philosophies and orthodoxies and things established; and yet, too, a world of the undiscovered. The youth awakes in this world, intellectually, in literature; and since the literature of the last age is that on which the new generation is formed, he now first comes in contact with the large life of mankind in the literature of the last century. It is an extraordinary miscellaneous literature, varied and copious in matter, full of conflicting ideas, cardinal truths, and hazardous guesses; and for the young mind the problem of orientation—that is of finding itself, of knowing the true East, is difficult. Literature, too, has an electric stimulation, and in the first onrush of the intellectual life brings that well-known storm and stress which is the true awakening; with eager and delighted surprise the soul feels fresh sensibilities and unsuspected energies rise in its being. It is a time of shocks, discoveries, experiences that change the face of the world. Reading the poets, the youth finds new dynamos in himself. A new truth unseals a new faculty in him; a new writer unlooses a new force in him; he becomes, like Briareus, hundred-handed, like Shakspere, myriad-minded. So like a miracle is the discovery of the power of life.

Let me illustrate the experience in the given case —the literature of the nineteenth century. It will all fall under three heads: the world of nature's frame, the world of man's action, the world of

God's being. Nature is, in the first instance, a spectacle. One may see the common sights of earth, and still have seen little. The young eye requires to be trained in what to see, what to choose to see out of the vague whole, and so to see his true self reflected there in another form, for in the same landscape the farmer, the military engineer, the painter see each a different picture. Burns teaches the young heart to see nature realistically, definitely, in hard outline, and always in association with human life—and the presence of animals friendly and serviceable to man, the life of the farm, is a dominant note in the scene. Byron guides the eye to elemental grandeur in the storm and in the massiveness of Alp and ocean. Shelley brings out colour and atmosphere and evokes the luminous spirit from every star and dew-drop and dying wave. Tennyson makes nature an artist's easel where from poem to poem glows the frescoing of the walls of life. Thus changing from page to page the youth sees nature with Burns as a man who sympathizes with human toil, with Byron as a man who would mate with the tempest, with Shelley as a man of almost spiritualized senses, with Tennyson as a man of artistic luxury. Again, nature is an order, a law in matter, such as science conceives her; and this phase appears inceptively in 'Queen Mab' and explicitly in 'In Memoriam', and many a minor poem of Tennyson, not the less great because minor in his work, in which alone the scientific spirit of the age has found utterance equal to its own sublimity. Yet, again, nature is a symbol, an expression of truth itself in another medium than thought; and so, in minute ways,

Burns moralized the 'Mountain Daisy', and Wordsworth the 'Small Celadine'; and, on the grand scale, Shelley mythologized nature in vast oracular figures of man's faith, hope, and destiny. And again, nature is a moulding influence so close to human life as to be a spiritual presence about and within it. This last feeling of the participation of nature in life is so fundamental that no master of song is without it; but, in this group, Wordsworth is pre-eminent as its exponent, with such directness, certainty and power did he seize and express it. What he saw in his dalesmen was what the mountains had made them; what he told in 'Tintern Abbey' was nature's making of him; what he sang in his lyric of ideal womanhood was such an intimacy of nature with woman's being that it was scarcely to be divided from her spirit. The power which fashions us from birth, sustains the vital force of the body, and feeds its growing functions, seems to exceed the blind and mute region of matter, and feeding the senses with colour, music and delight shapes the soul itself and guides it, and supports and consoles the child it has created in mortality. I do not overstate Wordsworth's sense of this truth; and it is a truth that twines about the roots of all poetry like a river of life. It explains to the growing boy something in his own history, and he goes on in the paths he has begun to follow, it may be with touches of vague mystery but with an expectant, receptive and responsive heart. In regard to nature, then, the youth's life under the favour of these poets appreciates her in at least these four ways, artistically, scientifically, symbolically and spiritually, and

begins to fix in moulds of his own spirit that miracle of change, the Protean being of matter.

To turn to the world of man's life, the simplest gain from contact with this literature of which I am speaking is in the education of the historic sense. Romance discovered history, and seeking adventure and thriving in what it sought, made that great find, the Middle Ages, which the previous time looked on much as we regard the civilization of China with mingled ignorance and contempt. It found also the Gael and the Northmen, and many an outlying region, many a buried tract of time. In Scott's novels characteristically, but also in countless others, in the rescued and revived ballad of England and the North, and in the renewed forms of Greek imagination, the historic sense is strongly drawn on, and no reader can escape its culture, for the place of history and its inspirational power in literature is fundamental in the spirit of the nineteenth century. But what most arrests the young heart, in this world of man's life, is those ideas which we sum up as the Revolution, and the principle of democracy which is primary in the literature of the last age. There the three great words—liberty, fraternity and equality—and the theory that in Shelley was so burning an enthusiasm and in Byron so passionate a force, are still aflame; and the new feeling toward man which was implicit in democracy is deeply planted in that aspect of fraternity which appears in the interest in the common lot, and in that aspect of liberty which appears in the sense of the dignity of the individual. Burns, Scott, Dickens illustrate the one; Byron, Shelley and Carlyle the

other. The literature of the great watchwords, the literature of the life of the humble classes, the literature of the rebellious individual will—the latter flashing out many a wild career and exploding many a startling theory of how life is to be lived—are the very core and substance of the time. The application of ideas to life in the large, of which Rousseau was so cardinal an example, opens an endless field in a century so rich in discovery, so active in intellect and so plastic in morals; and here one may wander at will. Here is matter for a life-time. But without particularizing, it is plain how variously, how profoundly and vividly through this literature the mind is exercised in the human world, takes on the colour, picturesqueness and movement of history, builds up the democratic social faith and develops the energy of individual freedom, and becomes a place for the career of great ideas.

There remains the world of God's being, or to vary the phrase in sympathy with the mode of approach characteristic of the nineteenth century, the world in which God is. It may be broadly stated that the notion of what used to be called an absentee God, a far-off Ruler overseeing by modes analogous to human administration the affairs of earth as a distant province, finds no place in this literature of the last age. The note of thought is rather of the intimacy of God with his creation and with the soul of man. God is known in two ways; as an idea in the intellect and as an experience in the emotions; and in poetry the two modes blend, and often blur where they blend. Their habitual expression in the great poets of the age is in pantheistic forms, but this is rather a matter

of form than of substance. The immanence of the divine is the root-idea; in Wordsworth it is an immanence of sublime power, seized through communion with nature; in Shelley, who was more profoundly human, it is an immanence of transcendent love, seized through his sense of the destiny of the universe that carries in its bosom the glory of life; in Tennyson, in whom the sense of a veiled intellect was more deep, it is an immanence of mystery in both the outer and the inner world. In other parts of the field, God is also conceived in history, and there immanent as Providence. His immanence in the individual—a matter dark to any thought—is most explicitly set forth by Emerson. It is perhaps generally considered that in the literature of the nineteenth century there is a large sceptical and atheistic element; but this is an error. Genius by its own nature has no part in the spirit that denies; it is positive, affirms and creates. Its apparent denials will be found to be partial, and affect fragments of a dead past only; its denials are, in reality, higher and more universal affirmations. If Wordsworth appears to put nature in the place of God, or Shelley love, or Keats beauty, they only affirm that phase of the divine which is nighest to their own apprehension, affection and delight. Their experience of the divine governs and blends with their intellectual theory, sometimes, as I have said, with a blur of thought. Each one's experience in these things is for himself alone, and private; the ways of the Spirit no man knows; but it is manifest that for the opening mind, whether of youth or of older years, the sense of eternity, however delicate, subtle and silent is its

realm, is fed nobly, sweetly and happily, by these poets in whom the spirit of man crying for expression unlocks the secrecy of its relations to the infinite.

Such is the nature of the contact of the mind with literature by means of which it enters on its race inheritance of idea and emotion, takes possession of the stored results, clothes itself with energies whose springs are in the earliest distance of time, and builds up anew for itself the whole and various world as it has come to be known by man in his age-long experience. The illustration I have employed minimizes the constancy, the completeness, the vastness of the process; for it takes no account of other disciplines, of religious tradition and practice, of oral transmission, and of such universal and intimate formative powers as mere language. But it will be found on analysis that all of these depend, in the main, on literature in the broad sense; and, in the education of the soul in the higher life, the awakening, the revealing and upbuilding force lies, I am persuaded, in the peculiar charge of literature in which the race-mind has stamped an image of itself.

It is obvious that what I have advanced, brings the principle of authority into a cardinal place in life, and clothes tradition with great power. It might seem that the individual in becoming one with the race-mind has only to endue himself with the past as with a garment, to take its mould with the patience of clay, and to be in the issue a recast of the past, thinking old thoughts, feeling old emotions, doing old actions, in pre-established ways. But this is to misconceive the process by which the individual effects this union; he does not take the impress of the race-mind as the wax

receives the imprint of the seal. This union is an act of life, a process of energy, joy and growth, of self-expression; here learning is living, and there is no other way to know the doctrine than to do its will; so the race-mind is not copied, but is perpetually re-born in men, and the world which each one of us thus builds for himself out of his preferred capacities, memories and desires—our farmer's, engineer's, painter's world, as I have said—is his own original and unique world. There is none like it, none. Originality consists in this re-birth of the world in the young soul. This world, nevertheless, the world of each of us, is not one of wilfulness, fantasy and caprice; if, on the one hand, it is such stuff as dreams are made of, on the other it is the stuff of necessity. It has a consistency, a law and fate, of its own, which supports, wields and sustains it. Authority is no more than the recognition of and obedience to this underlying principle of being, whose will is disclosed to us in man's life so far as that life in its wholeness falls within our view; in knowledge of this will all wisdom consists, of its action in us all experience is woven, and in union with it all private judgment is confirmed. Authority, truly interpreted, is only another phase of that identity of the soul in all men by virtue of which society exists, and especially that intellectual state arises, that state which used to be called the republic of letters and which is the institution of the race-mind to be the centre, the home and hope of civilization in all ages—that state where the unity of mankind is accomplished in the spiritual unities of science, art and love.

To sum up these suggestions which I have thought

it desirable to offer in order that the point of view taken in these lectures might, perhaps, be plain, I conceive of history as a single process in which through century after century in race after race the soul of man proceeds in a progressive comprehension of the universe and evolution of its own humanity, and passes on to each new generation its accumulated knowledge and developed energies, in their totality and without loss, at the acme of achievement. I conceive of this inheriting and bequeathing power as having its life and action in the race-mind. I conceive of literature as an organ of the race-mind, and of education as the process by which the individual enters into the race-mind, becomes more and more man, and in the spiritual life mainly by means of literature. I conceive of the body of men who thus live and work in the soul as constituting the intellectual state, that republic of letters, in which the race-mind reaches, from age to age, its maximum of knowledge and power, in men of genius and those whose lives they illumine, move and direct; the unity of mankind is the ideal end of this state, and the freeing of the soul which takes place in it is its means. I conceive of the progressive life of this state, in civilization after civilization, as a perpetual death of the best, in culture after culture, for the good of the lower, a continuing sacrifice, in the history of humanity, of man for mankind. And from this mystery, though to some it may seem only the recourse of intellectual despair, I pluck a confident faith in that imperishable relation which man and his works contain, and which though known only in the continuity of the race-mind, I am compelled to believe, has eternal reality.

W. C. BROWNELL

1851–1928

POE[1] (1909)

I

THERE is no more effective way of realizing the distinction of Poe's genius than by imagining American literature without him. One is tempted to add there is no other way. It is in the historic rather than in the critical estimate that his eminence appears. It owes more to its isolation than to its quality. He was extremely individual, the entire character of his mind and nature is acutely, almost painfully, certainly perversely, personal; but his originality appears chiefly in relief against the background of his environment. If he did not feel intensely, he thought energetically, but to a purport more familiar in older societies than in our own. His figure acquires outline and edge from its contrast with the prevailing Philistine screen which he sedulously kept behind it and on which he made it the business of his life to cast the sharpest possible shadow. He was from the first in complete disaccord with his environment and lived in a perpetual state of warfare with it. His parentage was bohemian, his childhood and youth dependent, his associations—in the half savage, half aristocratic society of his boyhood—expressly favorable to the development of the imperious beneficiary whose

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sense of his own powers and of his lack of claims brought him through a rather irregular and not very grateful adolescence to the threshold of a manhood of revolt. There is a whole literature of revolt in older countries. Our only Ishmael is Poe. But if not unprecedented in the history of letters he was sufficiently salient among us, and the fact that so generally his hand was against every man accentuated his individuality in the natural course of apology and polemic.

The established was with us still the moral and the didactic. Poe's antagonism instinctively inclined him to art. He is in fact the solitary artist of our elder literature. This is his distinction and will remain such. Hawthorne is in a degree a rival, but in form rather than in *fond* as his addiction to allegory attests and in any case his puritan preoccupation with the moral forces invalidates his purely aesthetic appeal. Poe's art was unalloyed. It was scrupulously devoid, at any rate, of any aim except that of producing an effect and often overspread if only occasionally clothed with the integument of beauty. As such it was in America at the time an exotic. His great service to his country is in a word the domestication of the exotic. Color, rhythm, space, strangeness, were his 'reals'; they fascinated his mind and took possession of his else unoccupied soul. In the large sense thus his art is in strictness to be called exotic rather than original. French, German, English romanticism had preceded him. He pillaged and plagiarized freely. In the matter of literary phase, his most convinced admirer and most thorough-going apologist observes that he came at the close of an

epoch, he did not introduce one. But in his hands the method and even the material that he adopted resulted in a very striking body of work, which still has the compactness and definition of a monument. And if he contributed little he passed on the torch. Incarnated in the vivid forms his pronounced individuality imagined, illustrated by the energy of his genius, the spirit of romantic art entered the portals of our literature and illuminated its staid precincts to the end of variety at the very least. Whatever her responsibility for the subsequent riot there, her vivifying influence is clear, and for it we are indebted to Poe.

II

The artist, by definition, exercises his activity in exclusive concentration upon his effect. In so far as his attention swerves from that he modifies his distinctive attitude. He may, of course, soar as well as sink in so doing. He may, for instance, forget his effect in the rapture of expression and rise to poetry. But unless, in so doing, his sub-consciousness at least keeps its hold on his effect—as, for example, Tennyson's always did—he pretermits his purely artistic function. This is why, in a world of imperfections, the most nearly perfect art is so often the least satisfactory—assuming the poetic to be the ultimate standard; why the perfection of Vermeer fades before the irregularities of Rembrandt; why we turn from Veronese to Tintoretto; why in only an occasional miracle of genius like Raphael at his best do we find a stable fusion of spirit and statement; why—to descend from august illustration—readers more sensitive to art than to

poetry are deceived by the poetic disguise of that arrant artist, Walt Whitman, who achieved a fairly radiant degree of perfection in never yawping his commonplaces off the key, in spite of the variety of their modulations. Like Whitman's, Poe's attention never wandered a moment from his effect—even in his poetry. Now the effect in poetry, as in any fine art, is largely a matter of technic, and a great deal of poetry is naturally over-valued, because it answers the technical test, because in short it sounds well.

In the first place its technic is so difficult that, when it is achieved with any distinction, it is rewarded with at least the temporary appreciation that inevitably rewards the *tour de force*. The technical test has in truth a good deal to say for itself practically. Winckelmann objected to artists' criticism of art that it naturally made difficulty overcome the test of achievement. But as a matter of fact, one may ask, is not this at least one test, since it is clearly one source of the superiority of the superior artist, whose laurels, without it, would be worn equally by the mute and the inglorious, not to say the manifestly incompetent? What one can say is that it is in no sense the test of the artist's inspiration, and that this is, after all, the main thing. The prodigious difficulties of the art of poetry, at any rate, are sufficiently attested by the abounding surplusage of unsuccessful attempts to surmount them. Everyone accordingly—except apparently the deluded practitioner—is struck by the exceptional victory when he encounters it, and apt unconsciously to ascribe to inspiration the effect really due to energy and skill, forgetting that even

inspired skill is not poetic inspiration. Much of the admiration of Poe's poetry is of this kind. Much of his poetry itself can be admired in no other way.

Moreover, the technic of poetry is so multifarious, so full of possibilities, so capable of producing pleasure by mere rhyme and rhythm that with many readers at all times and with all readers at some times its content is lost sight of. English literature has a wonderful example of this in the poetry of Swinburne. Swinburne is incomparable, but Poe has something—a tithe—of the same richness of rhythmic resource, though his numbers are artificial at times and at times tenuous to a degree that removes them from even superficial classification with the opulent spontaneity and splendor of the English poet's diction. They are, too, though less richly, more exclusively, technical, leaning thus all the more heavily on technic. And his technic, being thus the main factor of his verse, lacks a little the native felicity only to be secured by keeping it in its true relative position. Forced out of its proper subordination it loses its grace as a contributing element of a larger entity. It, instead of the subject, being the poet's main concern, its theoretic quality becomes obvious. It acquires a positively notional air with Poe at times—the air of illustrating the notions of his negligible 'Philosophy of Composition' and 'The Poetic Principle'. Its resources seem devices. Every effect seems due to an expedient. The repetend and the refrain are reliances with him —not instrumental, but thematic. At least they constitute rather than create the effect—which has therefore something otiose and perfunctory about it.

Technic of all sorts interested Poe tremendously. He had what might be called the technical temperament—a variety perhaps more familiar than widely recognized. It is the temperament that delights in terminology, labels, little boxes and drawers, definitions, catalogues, categories, all ingeniously, that is to say mechanically, apposite and perfectly rigid. It illustrates the passion for order run to seed —activity of mind avoiding the drudgery of thought by definiteness of classification. Manner being more susceptible of classification than matter, how the thing is done interests it more than the thing itself. Such a temperament on larger lines than common, with a certain sweep as well as system, Poe possessed. It rose to the pitch of positive genius with him. He pondered, himself, and lectured his contemporaries on how literature should be written, how a tale should be presented, how a poem should be built up. His criticism is largely, almost exclusively, technical. He pursued it quite in the detective spirit. His review of 'Barnaby Rudge', of which to Dickens's amazement he divined the dénouement, is worthy of M. Dupin and is historic. His long criticisms of Cooper and Hawthorne are craftsman's criticism. And as such they are extraordinarily good. They contrast refreshingly with the general run of literary praise and blame in his day—and in ours—in being specific, pointed and competent and avoiding the vague, the sentimental and the commonplaces of moralizing, though of course they have none of the overtones, so to say, of either culture or philosophic depth that enrich criticism as well as give it a creative value. His own craftsmanship considered strictly as such is

excellent. He proceeds with perfect self-possession and deliberation; and there is this to be said for his philosophizings about it, that at least they disclosed his own method and show conclusively that his art was an art of calculation and not the spontaneous expression of a weird and gruesome genius that it seems to so many upon whom it produces its carefully prepared effect.

His theory of poetry is stated within his account of the composition of 'The Raven', which is as a whole probably in no better faith than the anonymously published editorial reference to the poem that accompanied it on its appearance. Both are mystifications which if 'The Raven' were finer would tend to vulgarize it, and are only saved by being possibly derisory from being actually as risible as Mrs. Browning found the poem itself. But the theory advocated and illustrated by Poe is undoubtedly as sincere as his perverse pursuit of originality at any cost, and his temperamental revolt against what is staple and standard, not to speak of what is classic, would permit. It is briefly that poetry has absolutely nothing to do with truth, (to which he had an intellectual repugnance) that it is concerned solely with beauty (which he does not define, but assumes, in opposition to more conventional opinion from Plato to Keats, to be absolutely divorced from truth), and that its highest expression is the note of sadness—the sadder the better. Of these notions only the last need arrest attention. It is true that the most perfect beauty has often the note of sadness. The reason probably resides rather in its effect than in its constitution, being largely the recipient's subjective appreciation

reacting even in, or especially in, the presence of perfection which contrasts so bitterly with

> —the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world.

But it is not true that this is always the case. Who is to decide, for example, between the 'Ode to a Nightingale' and the 'Ode on Immortality'? Poe's theory, however, and its elaborate working out, involve the inference that 'The Raven' is a finer poem than either, since Wordsworth's ode is actually joyous, and the idea of 'The Raven' on the other hand sadder than anything in Keats's. He proves it by *a* plus *b*: Of all melancholy topics, he says, death is the most melancholy; it is most poetical when it allies itself with beauty; 'the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world.'

Any force his theory might abstractly be supposed to have, assuredly evaporates in his illustrative exposition of it and 'The Raven' is certainly superior to either. But two things are made perfectly clear by such theorizing: one, that the theorist is primarily not a poet but an artist—concerned less with expression than with effect; that is to say; and, the other, that he is not a natural but an eccentric artist, since sadness voluntary and predetermined is artificial and morbid. The poem itself—undoubtedly Poe's star performance—confirms these inductions. It is not a moving poem. It has, as Mrs. Browning herself admitted, a certain power, but it is such power as may be possessed by the incurable dilettante coldly caressing a morbid mood. To be moving melancholy must be tempera-

mental. Even a mood will not suffice. Whatever injustice is done its real genesis by Poe's farrago about it, 'The Raven' is in conception and execution exceptionally cold-blooded poetry. But, distinctly on the plane of artifice, it is admirable art. Less remarkable as a pure *tour de force* in linguistic luxuriance than the extraordinary 'Bells', which in its way is quite unparalleled, it is nevertheless a noteworthy technical achievement. Its rhythms and rhymes are more than clever and together with the recurrent accent of the refrain—already used by Lowell—combine in the production of a sustained tone and effect of totality, which may almost be said to epitomize Poe's genius.

Both 'The Raven' and 'The Bells' have enjoyed an enormous popularity among readers impressionable by effects and insensitive to distinctions, and their poetic strain has not saved them from being the natural prey of the professional elocutionist—also an elaborate technician in his more or less humble fashion. Poe's more personal verse has less interest. Some of it deserves Stoddard's verdict of 'doggerel', for where his own work, verse or prose, was concerned he had no standard. The lines 'For Helen' written when he was a boy are not only astonishingly precocious but charming, far better than those 'For Annie' written when he had matured and for the most part overlaid his inspiration with artistry and encrusted it with technic. The idea and inspiration of 'The Haunted Palace', however, amply sustain the happy technical art that expresses them with not only admirable musical aptness, but with a beautiful fusion of restraint born of taste and ease springing from

fulness that makes it an indisputable masterpiece. Its reserve, indeed, secures an objectivity that is exceptional in Poe and, since his art was fundamentally more genuine than his inspiration, exceptionally moving. For once he got himself out of the way and let his genius guide him to complete success. 'The Conqueror Worm' is less successful, I think, in being more a *tour de force*. It shares a little the 'staginess' of the *donnée* and his taste shows its fickleness by deserting him, though it is certainly a spirited piece of *voulu* pessimism and —no slight praise—the last two lines are among the classics of the 'catching'. On the other hand in 'Ulalume' one feels the sincerity latent in the most artificial and abnormal natures—though a sincerity that throws into sharper relief than usual the element of artifice in Poe's art and seems itself in the shadow that perhaps befits remorse, behind the apparatus of repetend and empty assonance that tries the reader's nerves. Even here one feels the aptness of Emerson's bland reference to him (in conversation with Mr. Howells) as the 'jingle man', and notes the artist rather than the poet and the technician rather than the artist. In any case the volume of his verse is so slight as to confine his claim to its quality, and its quality is, in general, hardly such as to place him very high up on the fairly populous slopes of Parnassus where there is more competition than he met with in his lifetime. Competition is fatal to Poe. His cue was distinctly to function outside of it, and he was wise to cultivate originality at any price.

III

As a technician his most noteworthy success is the completeness of his effect. He understood to perfection the value of tone in a composition, and tone is an element that is almost invaluable. In this respect he has no American and few foreign rivals. All of his writings attest his supreme comprehension of it—prose as well as poetry, the ablest and the most abject. Such rubbish as 'The Duc de l'Omelette' with its galvanic rictus of false but sustained gaiety; such elaborate and hollow solemnity as the parable 'Shadow', which ends, however, on a note of real pith and dignity; such a crazy-quilt of tinsel as 'The Assignation', all have this unifying quality which makes art of them. His very deficiency in the qualities usually present in the romance-writer and absolutely vital in romance of a high order, enabled him to cultivate his own special excellences the more exclusively. Many of the tales are tone and nothing else—not even tone of any particular character but a reticulation of relations merely in admirable unison. The false note is the one falsity he eschewed. Tinkling feet on a tufted carpet is nonsense, but it is not a false note in the verbal harmony of the artificial 'Raven'. In 'The Cask of Amontillado' the tone is like the click of malignant castanets. And in 'The Fall of the House of Usher' it reaches Poe's climax of power—a diapason of gloom, wholly voluntary, and ending none too soon perhaps, but maintained to the end with the success of a veritable *tour de force*. What on the other hand he did not understand was modulation. He has no variety. Probably

he realized this limitation and confined himself almost wholly in prose to the short story, grotesquely prescribing, too, one hundred lines as the limit of a poem. A novel by Poe is inconceivable, and would be even if he had the feeling for character and the human interest that the novel demands. This is partly because he lacked sustained power, and the larger art of organization and dynamic development, but it is also due to the monotony that results probably from the predominance and prolongation of the mood, which makes it so easy for him to secure tone.

Thus he achieves atmosphere but an atmosphere which is less the envelope than the content of his work, and which so enwraps the detail as to blend its accents and minimize the force of such variety as it has. Nothing takes place in 'The Fall of the House of Usher' that is not trivial and inconclusive compared with its successful monotone, its atmosphere of lurid murk and disintegrating gloom. And as a consequence of this inversion of the normal artistic relations of content and envelope I must say I think that even here, where we have Poe at his best, he refuses us all satisfaction that lies beyond the scope of purely scenic art. In this one respect 'The Cask of Amontillado' is better. It, too, is most remarkable artistically for its tone, the cascade of brilliant chatter that sustains its suspense. But it contains some psychology, devilish rather than human, to be sure, and therefore as usual ringing false, yet imaginatively thrilling in its malignity, though its monstrousness is rendered somewhat insipid by the perversity and characteristic inadequacy of its motive. And it has a situa-

tion both moral and material and a rapidly conducted, however meagre, action. But even these two tales as they stand do not take their author out of the rank of the purely scenic artist, comparatively high as they may place him within it. The truth is that no writer of anything approaching Poe's ability has been content to remain in this rank.

There is unquestionable power in his best tales, but it is a repellent power. Its manifestations are either unsympathetic or repulsive—unsympathetic where successful because they make their effect by attacking instead of charming the sensibilities, repulsive where they fail because nothing but success can excuse such sinister assault. The complaisant mental attitude of the reader who cooperates with a writer so systematically bent on his conquest instead of on his captivation is singularly innocent. And I do not think the experienced share it. Mainly, I imagine, Poe's stories are read in youth and rarely returned to—except by patriotic critics of a tendency to dithyramb, and too solicitous to magnify the salient figures of our literature to reconsider their own early evaluations. A mature judgment must discern, and a mature susceptibility resent, the writer's manifest motive. In fact his most characteristic limitation as an artist is the limited character of the pleasure he gives. He has a perverse instinct for restricting it to that produced by pain. Pain and pleasure have no doubt an equivalent aesthetic sanction. Metaphysically they are sometimes, indeed, difficult to distinguish; desire, for example, which superficially classes itself as pleasure being probably pain in reality. The

discussion of such a question would have delighted Poe; but it is unnecessary to quarrel with the legitimacy of painful effects in art—in which as in life no doubt, as Mrs. Browning declared, 'pain is not the fruit of pain'—in order to appreciate the perversity of Poe's practice in this regard. The production of pain is with him an end, not a means to the production of pleasure. His design is, crassly, to wring the withers of our sensoriums. Such a design is the delight of the degenerate. Decadents, such as Baudelaire, discern it readily and naturally—or unnaturally, as one chooses—savor it and enjoy to the full 'the generous pleasure of praising' it. The naive and hearty and good natured and uncritical with a weakness for the romantic at any price, such as Gautier, fail to note it and admire its results as revolutionary simply. Doubtless Poe did not himself realize this perversity in its fulness. Doubtless nothing would have surprised him more, and more evoked his scorn, than the assertion that such a foe to philistinism as himself lacked ideality. He had ideality but it was exclusively artistic. It was entirely consistent with unscrupulousness. No doubt the most loathsome subjects are susceptible of artistic treatment and may serve the ends of beauty. But a preference for them in the artist raises a presumption against his competence in the circumstances—a presumption amply justified in Poe's case. Not whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, but whatsoever things are effective were his preoccupation. Intensity of effect was accordingly his end, and artifice his means. And fine things are not thus produced. The law of the universe in virtue of which the beautiful, the true,

and the good are inextricably interrelated forbids it. Matthew Arnold maintained that it was 'lost labor' to inquire into a writer's motive. Undoubtedly errors have been made by allowing the real or supposed springs of a writer's production to color one's appreciation of them. Thackeray's view of Sterne, for example, is rather summary. But with Poe the case is different. The only reason for its being lost labor to inquire into his motive is the fact that his motive is in plain sight. And to neglect it would be to neglect what not only colors, but is the constituent element of a large portion—a large proportion indeed—of his writings.

In the most characteristic this motive is exactly that of the fat boy in 'Pickwick' who announced to his easily thrilled auditors that he was going to make their flesh creep. To accomplish this result, however, is more difficult than to announce it, unless one deals with an altogether higher order of material than Poe's, and is possessed of an altogether different order of powers. The element of awe is not, of course, in question, and there is no need to cite more august examples than that of Victor Hugo, for instance, to remind ourselves by contrast of the difference between the flesh-creeping effects produced by a master and those obtained by a charlatan who addresses not in the least the mind, but exclusively the nerves. In fact the comparison of any great writer to Poe, it may be incidentally remarked, results in the sense of contrast, and would undoubtedly instinctively be called unfair by his admirers, many of whom 'do not', as the phrase is, 'know very well what they want.' His success in accomplishing his desired effect at all

events is fatally compromised, usually, in two ways: his motive is too plain and his means are too primitive. He makes his motive so plain, not only by its constant undisguised and obvious recurrence, but by actual profession (see 'The Philosophy of Composition' and 'The Poetic Principle', for example) as to defeat its own end. It is impossible to meet halfway an artist whose efforts to surprise, shock, startle you are all the while in full sight. He must perforce forego the unconscious reciprocity of concern that is the essence of appreciation. A writer who declares at every turn, as the inveteracy of Poe's practice, his constant harping on the string of 'horror', declares, that he is 'going to make your flesh creep' can hardly succeed in doing so. In the face of such an announcement any flesh at all jaded by the extravagances of romanticism remains stationary. In the case of some of Poe's stories, in fact, positive paralysis ensues in the face of almost hysterical efforts on his part at galvanism; 'The Pest' for instance. For this carnomaniac purpose, too, his means are as primitive as his motive is plain. He can certainly produce his effect when the material he treats is of a nature to produce it in anyone's hands. The subject itself of 'The Premature Burial' is full of horror, and can be trusted to come home to the imagination of the reader under any treatment of it. So with the idea of being walled up alive as presented in 'The Cask of Amontillado'. So also with the situation in 'The Pit and The Pendulum'. But in most instances it may certainly be said that one does not get enough pain out of Poe to receive any great amount of pleasure from him.

He carries his 'unscrupulousness' very far indeed —much farther than even in Arnold's estimation Kinglake could be said to! In fact, if throughout his work you feel the artist, you also feel the artistic liar. He is the avatar of the type—a type tolerably well known in a multitude of examples from Mandeville to Münchausen and establishing perhaps through its mere existence, if anything could, the absence of any necessary connection between art and truth. Truth stood between him and originality. It irked him equally in pursuing the egregious, in which he delighted, and in eluding the commonplace, which he abhorred. The esoteric attracted, and the ecumenical repelled him. He was fascinated by the false as Hawthorne was by the fanciful. He was, as Henri Martin said of the Celt, 'always in revolt against the despotism of fact.' He was an artist in whom the great purpose of art, making the unreal appear real, became the end of making the false appear true. At this flagitious game he evinced the superior cleverness of the children of this world. Nowhere is his skill more noteworthy than in securing verisimilitude for the improbable, the incredible, one of the most obvious of his expedients being the auto-biographical form, for which he shows the notorious partiality of the so-called habitual liar. I have not made the calculation, but I should think there were not half a dozen of his sixty-eight tales in which this form is not employed, and these are not among his comparatively few successes; when the material is extraordinary this personal presentation of it gives it great plausibility in the esteem of the credulous, though it is to be said that it arouses a corresponding distrust in the sceptical. The same

fondness for the false appears in his occasional inversion of the process, whereby the truth is made to seem incredible—marvellous beyond belief, 'too good to be true', in a word, but true all the same. Here of course the falsity of effect merely takes the place of falsity of material. It was all one to Poe, provided he satisfied his passion for mystification. The shortest road to producing the sensational effect that alone he sought is to controvert the established order and for that road apart from its being the line of least resistance he had a native affinity. The key-note indeed of his nature is revolt.

In instinctive recalcitrancy to the general constitution of things he passed his life in kicking against its pricks and produced his literature in the process. Inevitably the false, the ugly and the wrong attracted him, since the established standard is of the good, the beautiful and the true. But as the established is the only conceivable standard, he was naturally forced to treat the former trinity in conjunction with, if not in terms of, the latter. The effect he aimed at being exclusively a sensational effect, he could best secure it by falsifying his material, and thus circumventing the reader's tranquillity of expectation. The fact that such sensation is valueless was of no concern to a philosopher who attached value to sensation as such and to sensation only. Hence he devoted the powers of an extraordinary intellect to producing what is to the intellect of next to no interest. The abnormal, in its various manifestations, the sinister, the diseased, the deflected, even the disgusting were his natural theme. He could not conceive the normal save as the commonplace for which he had

apparently the 'horror' he would have liked to inspire in others by the presentation of the eccentric. Dread of the commonplace, as was pointed out centuries ago by a far otherwise penetrating critic than Poe, is fatal to the sublime. And there is assuredly no sublimity in Poe.

Yet the tales of horror and those of the weird and the fantastic probably stand in the widest popular estimate as especially characteristic. And it is true that is of these one thinks when one speaks of a Poe story. They have, many of them, the evil eminence that wilful morbidity lends to the production of its votaries of genius, and except for the effect on the nerves which a few of them are able to produce on 'suggestible' sensoriums, they hold their place among other writings of a similar sort—there are none precisely like them, because of their meagreness—chiefly on account of their scenic quality. More has been claimed for the 'tales of ratiocination' as they are called. Writers before Poe have 'grovelled in the ghastly and wallowed in the weird' with considerable effect if with an art inferior to his. But he has been called the inventor of the detective story, and thus decorated with a badge of unique distinction in the hierarchy of literature. It is always difficult to assign with certainty to any individual the invention of a literary or plastic genre. 'Doubtless Homer had his Homer', remarks Thoreau. M. Dupin was certainly preceded by Zadig, and Voltaire is said to have invented 'Zadig' after reading an Oriental prototype. And even ascribing to Poe the invention of the detective story, the lover of literature may justly exclaim, '*la belle affaire!*' and feel disposed rather to charge

than to credit him with it. However, to start or even accelerate a literary current of magnitude, whatever its merit, is an accomplishment so rare as to be noteworthy on that account alone. And though it is, no doubt, the detective story that is most indebted to him in this respect, it is by no means the only fruit of his remarkable inventiveness. 'No man', says a writer in the London *Spectator*, 'struck out so many new lines in the region of romance', and he proceeds to derive Jules Verne's stories from 'Hans Pfall', 'She' from 'A. Gordon Pym', 'Treasure Island' from 'The Gold Bug', 'Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde' from 'William Wilson', Zola's, Flaubert's and even Mr. H. G. Wells's realism from Poe's minute detail, etc. This does not of course modify his own conclusion that 'it is an inhuman and perverse judgment that finds in Poe the springs of truly great writing'; and it should also be pointed out that there is a considerable element of fancifulness—the fancifulness of the literal—in such romantic etymology. It is quite conceivable that neither Jules Verne nor Stevenson, nor Rider Haggard nor any of the other writers in question was conscious of any specific or general indebtedness to Poe, whom also in the different *genres* in question, save perhaps that of 'The Gold Bug', they one and all altogether surpassed. Mr. Wells, for example, might excusably prefer to derive his mystification from the minute detail of Swift. Nevertheless, such analogies are eloquent witness of Poe's inventive genius—characterize, in fact, his genius *as* inventive rather than imaginative.

For that reason he seems to me, as I began by saying, more personal than truly original in the

higher literary sense, since, though he was extremely idiosyncratic, nevertheless what he originated lay definitely in the sphere of invention. His imaginative writing is far less original. Having the imaginative in mind we may say that originality consists in taking a fresh view, originating a new conspectus, a new synthesis, of life and the world—turning objective material around a little and exhibiting it with a different silhouette. It is in this way that real contributions to literature are made, and it is thus that the really great writer serves literature as the savant advances science. There is nothing of this kind to be looked for in Poe. The true material of literature he left precisely where he found it, for all his fantastic stirring of it and uneasy striving with it. On the lower plane of invention, his mechanical and mathematical turn, his fecundity in ideas, conceptions, experimental notions certainly devised new modes, new fashions as it were, in fiction—which, indeed, was precisely what he himself understood by the originality he pursued and declared universally attainable. And in this field 'ratiocination' is distinctly his forte. Here he excelled if he did not, narrowly speaking, invent; or rather, broadly speaking, excelled as well as invented. In this respect 'The Gold Bug' is probably an unsurpassed masterpiece; a masterpiece, at any rate—which is no doubt eulogy enough, though M. Lemaitre's characterization of Maupassant as 'à peu près irréprochable dans un genre qui ne l'est pas', is certainly applicable to it. So in a less degree is 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'. 'The Purloined Letter' is decidedly inferior and 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' quite

unworthy of the inventor of the detective story. In 'The Purloined Letter' the effect of M. Dupin's contemptuousness dominates that of his skill, and in 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' the arrogance of the author is destructive of all interest in a tale that is also otherwise tedious. When Poe's personality comes to the surface the effect is always unpleasant, and it is the absence of temperamental color that gives an agreeable relief to such exhibitions of his purely intellectual activity as 'The Gold Bug' and 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue'; just as among his weird and fantastic tales the best are those in which there are the most evidences of his art and the fewest of his disposition.

However, the extraordinary disproportion of inferior work in his prose does not obscure the fact that he was essentially an artist. The fact that there are hardly a dozen good ones among his sixty-eight tales is not due to any deflection of his artistic attitude. He had no other attitude—save that of necessity involved in his contentious exposition of artistic principles and his temperamental reprobation of practitioners of a different turn. Polemically he certainly shows little of the detachment so often prescribed to the artist. But even in polemic whenever he is in the least impersonal and disinterested it is the artistic for which he is contending. He is not averse to 'abusing the plaintiff's attorney', but the plaintiff's case he attacks on artistic grounds. Even in his poorer work, even in his poorest, the workmanship is always the best element. It is poor enough in some of it, but in such tales as 'Four Beasts in One', 'Loss of Breath', 'The Man that was Used Up', 'Never Bet the Devil

Your Head', in fact almost all the 'tales of extravaganza and caprice', there is assuredly nothing else. In such inexplicable 'extravaganzas' as 'The Duc de l'Omelette' and 'Lionizing' its stark saliance gets on one's nerves. The excessive predominance of this kind of thing in his tales is due obviously to failure in inspiration. But more obscurely it is undoubtedly due to alcohol. 'Bon-Bon', for example, seems definitely characteristic of inebriety. The effect of alcohol is well known to be the relief of that tension which the maintenance of equilibrium imposes so painfully on such organizations as Poe's, and a consequence of excessive indulgence in it is therefore the loss of that balance of the faculties which secures correct judgments. It is impossible to account for much of Poe's writing except on the theory that both in conception and in execution it was in this way transfigured to his mind and sense. He saw it through the mist of mental congestion and saw in its incoherence the significance that escapes sobriety. Even his egotism would be insufficient otherwise to explain it. The effects of opium in stimulating and coloring the poetic imagination—as in Coleridge's case—are familiar. But those of alcohol are pathologically quite different and quite inferior, and it does not seem to have been sufficiently remarked that in Poe's case they were undoubtedly responsible for the deterioration of his literary productions as well as for the pathetic disintegration of his life. It is a generous instinct that shrinks from dwelling on the latter, but the naïveté that ignores the obvious origin of much of his 'extravaganza and caprice' is less generous than blind—and above all slightly

ridiculous. The explanation at all events seems to reduce *ad absurdum* the sanction of being 'thrilled' for the 'thrill's' sake.

IV

The truth is, it is idle to endeavor to make a great writer of Poe because whatever his merits as a literary artist his writings lack the elements not only of great, but of real, literature. They lack substance. Literature is more than an art. It is art in an extended sense of the term. Since it is the art that deals with life rather than with appearances it is the art *par excellence* that is art plus something else—plus substance. Its interest is immensely narrowed when it can only be considered plastically—narrowed to the point of inanity, of insignificance. Poe was certainly an artist, but the fact that he was exclusively an artist and an artist in an extremely restricted sense, of itself minimizes the literature he produced. Shakespeare, for example, is neither exclusively nor supremely an artist. M. Jules Lemaître informs us how much better in some respects—in artistic respects—Racine would have written 'Hamlet'. Every art, of course, has its conventions. It rearranges them from time to time, it is subject to the law of evolution, but it depends on them always. And in so far as literature is an art it, too, leans upon them. It has its schools, its phases, its successive points of view, its academic perfections, its solecisms. But the fact that it deals with life itself rather than exclusively with appearances—which may be arranged, organized, systematized, controlled far more easily through their greater preliminary

simplification—gives it so much more range, so much greater freedom, such an infinitely greater miscellaneity of material of so much more significance and vitality, that it is comparatively independent of conventions, and finds its supreme justification in giving anyhow, in any way, well or ill one may almost say, the effect of life, the phenomena and significance of life which constitute its substance. Thus it is that in literature substance counts so much more than it counts in any other art, however much any other may also be in its degree 'a criticism of life'. Mr. Henry James has curiously illustrated the principle in later years. Beginning as pre-eminently or at least conspicuously an artist he has become so overwhelmed by the prodigious wealth and miscellaneity of his material —that is to say, the phases of life which his prodigious penetration has revealed to him—that his art has been submerged by it. The trees have obliterated the forest. All the more important is it, one may argue, to cling to conventions of treatment, that your picture of life may be definite, coherent and effective. Yes, but one of these conventions is a certain correspondence with reality. Life being the subject of literature more fully and directly than it is of any purely plastic art that deals with appearances—which are necessarily more ordered and adaptable and in a sense art themselves, or a stage of it—being indeed the substance as well as the subject of literature, this correspondence with reality is exacted by it of any treatment of it that is, even as art, to have any interest or value. The doctrine of art for art's sake applied to literature is apt to have particularly insipid results.

In short, however extravagant and capricious, any work of art is necessarily subject to its material and the hand of every artist must like the dyer's be subdued to what it works in. But a literary composition, especially, cannot be conceived and executed *in vacuo*. The warp must be 'given', however wholly the woof may be invented, or the web will be insubstantial and the pattern incoherent. Poe could transact his imaginings in environments of the purest fancy, in no-man's land, in the country of nowhere, and fill these with 'tarns' and morasses and 'ragged mountains' and shrieking water-lilies, flood them with ghastly moonlight and aerate them with 'rank miasmas'. Nevertheless, he could only avoid the flatness of pure phantasmagoria by peopling them with humanity. His landscape might embody extravagance and his atmosphere enshroud caprice, his figures demanded to be made human. The overwhelming interest of fiction is its human interest. Since it is peopled with human figures neglect of its population is a contradiction in terms. Even in the fiction of adventure, in which the personages are minimized and the incidents the main concern, even in fiction in which plot figures as the protagonist of the drama, plot and incident would be sterile but for the characters that figure in them. However subordinate and undifferentiated these may be, they must make some intrinsic appeal, or we should not care what happened to them. The game even as a game is not one that can be played with counters. Yet, that is precisely the way in which Poe played it. And his stories have no human interest because humanity did not in the least interest him. Neither man nor woman de-

lighted him enough to occupy his genius even incidentally. His tales contain, of course, no 'character'—that prime essential, and most exacting *raison-d'être* of normal fiction. But what is surprising is the absolute inhumanity of the personages he is compelled to incarnate and the absolutely inhuman way in which he sets them forth. In almost every case of importance, as I have said, the chief personage is the narrator and—perhaps a little from this substantially unvaried practice, though mainly, I think, because of the real resemblance—the narrator suggests Poe himself. Each is very baldly the centre of his universe. The two take pretty much the same view—an astonishingly external one so far as human nature is concerned. The illusion of the story is subserved, but of the story quite apart from the personages. What it gains in illusion, it loses in significance. Indeed, so great is the importance of human character to a story that deals with it at all, that I think those of Poe's tales in which the personages are the least shadowy, the least like algebraic symbols, the least characteristic, that is to say, are greatly helped by the fact. The stories in which he figures gain greatly from M. Dupin, who has a pedantic and censorious temperament, though his differentiation is as inferior to that of his successor, M. Lecocq, as the meagre and mathematical medium in which he exists is to the varied and entertaining field of activity, full of character and crowded with incident, that Gaboriau furnished for the latter—without, however, reaching eminence as a 'world-author' in the process. 'The Fall of the House of Usher' gains greatly from the characters therein,

though these are merely sketches for the reader's imagination to fill out. One thinks of 'Wuthering Heights' and of the place in literature that would have been assigned to Emily Brontë by Poe admirers, had she had the good fortune to be born an American. 'The Pit and The Pendulum', one of the best of the tales, it seems to me, owes much to its exceptional 'psychology' as an imaginative study of real torture to which ingenuity gives real point instead of merely displaying itself as ingenuity. It is helped, too, I think, by being localized in real time and space; by the fact that there was such an institution as the Inquisition, a fabric also quite otherwise 'thrilling' than any of Poe's imagination, and that the victim's rescuers had an actual and the correct nationality, though I fear these considerations would seem philistine indeed to the true Poe worshipper. Furthermore, 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue' forfeits a large part of its interest, the moment it appears that the murderer is an ape and not a human malefactor. *Ce n'est que ça*, one feels like exclaiming—and repeating even when William Wilson's double dissolves into his conscience, though of course allegorically that is the point of the story, as well as being very cleverly, very ingeniously, managed. Finally one of the tales —'The System of Dr. Tarr and Dr. Fether'—has an exceptional interest because it is an intelligent, though it does not pretend to be a profound, study of a phase of mind and character under certain conditions and in a certain environment, executed with a wholly unaccustomed lightness of touch and an aspect of gayety. The scene, however, it will be remembered, is a *maison de santé* and the person-

ages are its inmates. And nothing is more characteristic of Poe's perversity than that his most normal fiction should be the representation of the abnormal. The abnormal was essential to him, and he only varied his practice of achieving it in his treatment by securing it in his material. Taken with the whim of depicting human nature he could at least select its deflected types. Even here, however, his interest is clearly in treating his material in a rather ghastly vein of contrasting and contra-indicated *bouffe*. He cares nothing for his 'types', and his real success, such as it is, is incidental.

Similarly with his preoccupation with crime—almost an obsession with him. He is never concerned with sin, which is too integrally human an element of life to interest him. Crime on the contrary is in comparison of an artificial nature, and of however frequent still of exceptional occurrence. Undoubtedly it furnishes apposite material to the novelist of character as well as to the portraitist of manners, and is a personal as well as a social factor in human life. But this aspect of it Poe, whose criminals are only criminals, completely ignores. He uses it not naturalistically but conventionally. It is his conventional machinery for his story. Like Mme. Tussaud and Mrs. Jarley he finds in it the readiest instrument of his most cherished effects. And so far as he 'psychologizes' it he increases its inherent artificiality by treating it with morbid imaginativeness, endeavoring after his favorite method to give the illusion of reality to its abnormal repellency, and not at all concerned about demonstrating its real character. Here he is measurably successful in such a tale as 'The Imp of the Perverse'

where he utilizes the well known tendency of the criminal to confess, and totally fails in such absurdity as 'The Black Cat', a story that could hardly have 'thrilled' Ichabod Crane; but one illustrates his lack of human feeling as well as the other. And of almost all the stories into which the element of humanity enters perforce, it may be said, finally, that the residuum is not so much worth while as to earn neglect of his shortcomings in a respect normally vital to the kind of thing he is doing. In a word the 'Poe' in his stories could only be moving and effective, if this element were present also.

For the only thing that can give any significance, any vital interest, any value, in a word, to the weird and the fantastic themselves is to establish them somehow in some human relationship—as Hoffmann does. Otherwise they are simply phenomena that appeal strictly to the nerves. Poe's treatment of them negatives their sole sanction. 'He can thrill you as no one else can', says one of his admirers. As to that there are several things to be said. In the first place it depends a good deal on who you are, whether you are 'thrilled' or not. In the next place, how are you 'thrilled'? As you are by the knocking at the door in Macbeth, or as you are by a bad dream or a gruesome sight in actual life? Thirdly, are you thus affected because the story *is* thrilling, or because, as I have already noted, your own imagination is set at work as to how you would be affected by experiencing what you are reading of—'The Premature Burial' for example—forgetful of the fact that personal application, than which nothing is more common, notoriously vitiates any objective judgment. Finally, of

what value after all is 'gooseflesh' as a guide to correct estimates in art? Is this hyperaesthetic reaction a trustworthy measure of real aesthetic merit? To ask these questions is of course to answer them. But even accepting this effect on the nerves as evidence of Poe's power, even of his unique power—for I think no other writer ever essayed it so baldly—its essential insignificance must be admitted because it is wholly divorced from any element of interest outside of itself. Instead of itself being an element in a composition, as with Hoffmann, Poe's weirdness is the whole thing. An occasional discord has its uses in a work of harmony, but the scrannel shriek of a locomotive performs no function but that of irritation, though it may 'thrill' or even deafen a listener. It is certainly more important to be moved than to be moved pleasantly, but to be moved to no purpose, to be agitated aimlessly in no direction, is an unsatisfactory experience.

It is needless to specify instances among Poe's tales that illustrate this exclusive appeal to the nerves. It would be difficult to find any among those of the weird class that do not. Besides, in them it was his theory, his 'scheme', to create this precise effect and no other. The particularly crass one of 'Berenice', however, shows his method in particular relief. It is that product of his genius in which a madman recounts his fascination by the beautiful teeth of his mistress and his exhumation of her remains for the purpose of extracting them as a last exercise of his faculties before losing these completely. Poe sometimes went too far and did so in this instance, naively admits one of his earlier

editors! As if it mattered where along that line one stopped. The partly ridiculous, partly repulsive, wholly inept quality of the performance is stamped as such at the start. The serious workmanship only emphasizes the fact that the personages are lay figures, the *motif* insane, the story incredible. As a ship-shape and coherent account of incoherent horror it may contain a 'thrill' for the predisposed, but it is fully as fitted to wake a smile as a shudder and there is obviously no standard by which to admeasure this sort of thing except that of technical execution. Any reader of 'Berenice' not a neurasthenic must inevitably ask, 'What of it?' Having no import it has no importance.

V

'Berenice' epitomizes very well Poe's lack of substance, and the insignificance of the fantastic element in his work which this lack of substance involves. It also illustrates the aridity of his imagination. Imagination is, in the view of most of his admirers, probably his most striking, his most salient possession. But it is darkening counsel to stop with this mere ascription as if imagination were an invariable rather than a protean faculty. Poe's imagination was of a peculiarly personal kind. It intensified his divining powers, but never extended his range of thought. It was thoroughly, integrally, analytic. His 'Tales of Conscience', as they have been called, deal mechanically so far as they do not deal conventionally with conscience. There is no largely imaginative treatment of it. They summarize phenomena deduced from remorse and fear as forces and, confined to crime as they

are, involve little imaginative psychology. His imaginings are largely inventive, and important as the imagination is to the inventor, the tendency to invention is apt to imply an inferior order of it. The poets are sadly lacking in the inventive faculty. It is essentially logical, concatenated, mechanical. It has no spiritual and no sensuous side. Poe's inventiveness is his chief mental trait and his imagination was its servant. He is perhaps at his best in 'The Gold Bug'—to Poe's partisans a miracle of imaginative invention but only to his partisans anything else. His spiritual side is illustrated by his 'Ligeias', Eleonoras' and 'Morellas'—which measured by a serious standard are scarcely more than morbid moonings. The ingenuity of his one spiritual tale, 'William Wilson' is far more in evidence than its imaginativeness. It is an extremely artistic piece of workmanship and shows what Poe's art could do in the service of truth instead of mystification. But only up to the point when you perceive it *is* mystification after all. Curiously, *then* the effect deliquesces—when its meaning appears—with the entrance of avowed allegory. The whole thing becomes insubstantial because his imagination is unequal to conducting his fine conception to its conclusion without destroying his illusion. His sensuousness is distinctly rudimentary, all glitter and tinsel, ebony and silver. His consecration to beauty seems a little ironical in the light of his too frequent conception of it. Witness 'The Assignation', with its 'mingled and conflicting perfumes, reeking up from strange convolute censers, together with multitudinous flaring and flickering tongues of emerald and violet

fire', its 'thousand reflections from curtains which rolled from their cornices like cataracts of molten silver', its 'beams of natural glory' which 'mingled at length fitfully with the artificial light and lay weltering in subdued masses upon a carpet of rich, liquid-looking cloth of Chili gold'—all of which 'richesse de café', as Balzac would call it, suggests Thackeray caricaturing Disraeli and Bulwer combined—those twin sources of Poe's style according to his latest editors, who, however, must have been thinking only of its extravagances, as his style in general is admirable.

In any case such writing is not sensuous but scenic. And Poe had no more the sensuous than the sensual strain. The sensual as commonly understood does not exist for him, apparently, as it is apt not to in persons of his variety of nervous organization, and his writings it is to be pointed out have this signal negative merit. But he perhaps pays for it in some degree by an extraordinary aridity in the whole sensuous sphere. When he enters this he is either perfectly insignificant or else his taste deserts him. He is too insincere to succeed in it. His nature requires the element of the artificial which distinguishes the scenic. His genius was certainly a striking one and if he was a charlatan he certainly had a genius for charlatanry. He revelled in the specious. The vivid aspect of reality he gave to his creations is due to his skill in its use, for he never *felt* reality and was impervious to its appeal as the true constitution of the universe, moral and material. What he desired was to be striking. He says so in so many words in one of his disingenuous (or merely perverse, who knows?) argumentations,

contending that any one can be original if he will. And his usual means of accomplishing it was by giving through speciousness the semblance of reality to the unreal and incredible. He relied on this far more than even on his scenic imagination, though his scenic imagination gave him great power of vivid material realization; his landscapes are stereoscopic. The scenic, however, demands scale. With Poe the scale is too small. His stage is lilliputian. He is so fond of the lime-light in itself that he floods his picture with it. But for the proper play of this illuminant more time and space are needed than his cabinet canvas contains. His imagination is not rich enough to engender extension, endue it with continuity and crowd it with action. His action is always meagre and, one may say, deduced from, rather than largely illustrative of, his idea. Or else it is conventional, as in the 'Adventures of A. Gordon Pym' which is the acme of stereotyped 'adventure', imitating even the religious out-givings of 'Robinson Crusoe' with grotesquely mechanical effect.

On the other hand he was full of ideas. If he lacked the visualizing moral power of the image-making faculty, if his action and incidents are meagre and gain their aspect of reality through a specious art of presentation rather than by the actual incarnation of artistic vision, what eminently he did not lack was fertility in intellectual conception. Sixty-eight stories, whatever their average quality, are a good many. His picture might be vague, but it never lacked subject. He cannot be said to have lived in the world of ideas, in the accepted sense of the phrase, for he had but a

smattering acquaintance with its established consensus. Predeterminedly original, however, he created his own. Artist as he was, he was nevertheless far more predisposed to the abstract than to the concrete, except in the purely material sphere; he began with principle and proceeded to phenomena, in irreproachably deductive fashion. Analytical as he was, he conducted his analysis deductively; he had a passion for ratiocination, but he argues synthetically. His conclusion is always his own point of departure—artistically withheld till the climax is reached in the verification of hypothesis. This is the difference between M. Dupin and the inductive Zadig, for example. He was tremendously concerned with theory, a circumstance that gives point to his criticism and coherence to his tales, however it may devitalize his poetry. His mind was highly speculative, inquiring, even inquisitional. He had a prodigious interest in problems, puzzles, rebuses—an interest that to those who do not share it is apt to seem inept. He was in a way a conjurer in literature. He delighted in mystification—which is as much as to say he had no other interest in mystery. He was less of a mystic than any writer who has ever dealt with the mysterious. He had vastly more affinity with Cagliostro than with Hoffmann from whom—inexplicably—he is so often said to derive. Without the vanity he had the conceit and enjoyed the complacence of the prestidigitator.

In his early studies, mathematics, and in his later reading, science in general, attracted him most genuinely. With all his gift for language it interested him mainly as syntax, and his knowledge of lan-

guages was as superficial as his care for letters. His French for example—which is not infrequent—is what he would censure in another as culpably ignorant. He may be said, indeed, to have indulged his mathematical turn in his philosophy of life—or whatever may serve to pass for it with him; of course as such he had no philosophy of life. His interest in ideas did not extend to moral ones, of which he had none. The whole world of morals was a terra incognita to him—not at all the same thing as saying, which is also true, that he had no morals. Coleridge, for example, has been said to have had none, but he was immensely concerned with their philosophy. Poe's personal egotism accentuated by his indulgence freed him from a sense of personal responsibility no doubt, but the singular thing about him as a writer is that man's moral nature made no appeal to his imagination. Morbid psychology, to be sure, was a part of his material, but he used it almost altogether as a means mainly mechanical to the production of a dramatic effect. And even here his general ideas have not the scope and freedom they have in the purely intellectual sphere, but evince the succinct specific quality that marks the 'notation' of phenomena. So that even his determination to the abnormal does not in the unfamiliar moral sphere remark any law of general import—except such commonplaces as the tendency of the criminal to confession already noted. And of course, as regards morals in the extended sense, he had, about man's habits and customs, around which the imagination of the normal literary artist plays perpetually, no ideas at all, either general or otherwise.

In brief, his lack of moral imagination accounts for the vacuity of his writings. A writer's product is characterized in great part by what he lacks as well as by what he possesses, by his defects as well as by his qualities. It is no reproach to a theological writer to be ignorant of the fine-arts unless he refers to them. On the other hand it would be an insufficient characterization of a landscape painter to say that he could paint clouds if he could not paint trees, though certainly if he painted clouds extraordinarily well, that would be the most important thing to say about him, as it would signalize his contribution to landscape art, besides which his failure in any respect would be more negligible. The theory of criticism, however, which holds that the excellences of a performance are alone worth attention, that it is, unlike a rope, to be judged only by its strongest part, and that the function of criticism is really the judicial dispensing of rewards of merit, is unsatisfactory and provincial. The whole work is there calling for critical account and, due attention paid to the matter of emphasis and accent, its sins both of commission and omission are germane to critical consideration. In practice the other theory leads to notorious confusion and —as Americans at least must be constantly reminded—the distinction between good and bad is obscured by mechanically ascribing to a failure the characteristics of a performer's successes. At all events it is pertinently illuminating to find a writer of tales, criticism and poetry deficient in the philosophy of life, letters and feeling, not only because this at once ranks his product and measures its value, but on account of the light it throws on his

productive faculty itself—his imagination. It is a just reproach to Hawthorne that he suffered the genius that produced 'The Scarlet Letter' to produce little or nothing else comparable with it. But the case is quite different with Poe, because tales, criticism and poetry of real value cannot be written or can only occasionally be written with Poe's equipment. The wonder is not that he did not succeed oftener, but that he succeeded at all, as assuredly he did in his own way—one can hardly say his own *genre*, since he had no congeners.

It is a mistake to try to classify him. He is very strictly *sui generis*. So appalling an egoist could hardly fail to be. No more superficial association was ever made than in relating him to Hoffmann, in whom the weird and the fantastic are always in close and generally in affectionate companionship with sentiment and humor. 'Where form dominates,' says Balzac, 'sentiment disappears', and in the temperament of the technician humor has as little place as sentiment. Notoriously Poe had none of either. He was an artist with a controlling bent toward artifice, exaggeratedly theoretic, convinced that the beautiful is the strange and the sad the poetic, and exercising his imagination through every expedient of ingenious invention, to the end of producing effects of strangeness to the point of abnormality and of sadness to the point of horror. Compact of neurotic sensationalism and saturated with the specious, Poe's 'thrilling' tales taken in the mass illustrate the most detestable misuse of imaginative powers within the limits of serious literature, and only fall within these limits by the intellectual vigor which oftenest they argue rather

than evince. 'It 's a weary feast', says Thackeray, 'that banquet of wit where no love is.' And Poe's banquet is as bereft of wit as it is destitute of love. He lacked humor and he lacked heart.

VI

If even his imagination was thus limited it was perhaps partly because the field of its exercise was naturally limited by his lack of culture. He had no culture properly so called. He applied the schoolmaster's rod to others with the gusto of pretentiousness, but discipline is precisely and *par excellence* what he lacked himself. He is the notablest example to be found among men of letters of a writer living exclusively in the realm of the intellect without developing or enriching his own. His first work is as good as his last. He read much but without purpose. In this single respect his editors have perhaps done him somewhat less than justice in saying, 'His sources were, at first, books of which Disraeli's "Curiosities of Literature" is a type, and in science some elementary works; generally he seems to have read books only for review, as they came under his notice at random, but he paid much attention to the magazines, home and foreign, throughout his life'. Desultory as his reading was it was not indolent and hap-hazard. Devoid of sentiment, he eschewed 'trash'. And without any spirit of *suite*, or any persistent amassing of knowledge, still less with any ordered and philosophic acquisition, his purely intellectual organization led him into the realm of learning, where he was distinctly at home without, however, possessing the moral purpose to benefit by his stay. He satisfied his curiosity,

following an indubitable natural bent, without engaging his responsibility or really increasing his knowledge. There is no such absurd *fatras* in literature as the absurd 'Eureka'. He found his practical account in these excursions. All was grist that came to his mill. Just as he read the current product for journalistic ends, he pursued in literature out-of-the-way paths in search of the odd and the unfamiliar with a similar motive—at least with a similar result. What he found there served to decorate his own writing with the unconventional and the recondite. His writing is bedizened with the frippery of learning often, but one suspects that most of the goods, in familiar phrase, are in the shop-window. And his *étalage* of learning is that of the literary charlatan—an arsenal of the occult and the obscure, the abstruse and the exotic, above all the esoteric and the technical, the whole chosen and calculated to impose on the credulous and mesmerize the impressionable.

But it is doubtful if any one of his circle had as much reading. In this respect he belonged rather in the New England that he constantly jeered at as provincial and hated with a genuine and sometimes clairvoyant hatred. The weaknesses of Isaac are apparent enough to Ishmael and though his railing at them may seem Bedouin to the Brahmin, it is not to be called Boeotian. There was probably no one within the purview of Transcendentalism capable of writing the following: 'Sculpture, although in its nature rigorously poetical, was too limited in its extent and consequence to have occupied, at any time, much of his attention.' Possibly Poe was not and got it from Goethe, as almost

certainly he did the remark on the next page of 'The Domain of Arnheim': 'No such paradises are to be found in reality as have glowed on the canvas of Claude'—a landscape by whom he had probably never seen. It is difficult to determine the true inventory of the predatory, but appreciation of Goethe's aestheticism is in itself a distinction for Poe's time. Nor is he to be called bohemian. His habits were irregular enough, but the bohemian has no intellectual curiosity, and Poe was made of it. The bohemian is content 'merely to bask and ripen'. Poe was a worker. His irregularities have obscured for us his exceptional industry. They interfered sadly with his accomplishment, but with its amount far less than with its character. In spite of them he kept at work—or at least returned to work when he could. His indigence and the heavy pressure of it on the two beings he cared for were a constant stimulus to a nature that, whatever its faults, knew not supineness. With even less urgent need he would have worked as hard—perhaps even, considering the instability of his nervous organization, to better purpose, since he would have been less harried by the cormorant care. He had the disposition of the fighter, and his failings did not mine his fortitude nor his failures discourage, however they might transiently deject him. He was not an idler or a dreamer. His mental activity was constantly informed with purpose, and directed with assiduity. He was always full of energy when he was not hamstrung by exhaustion. No bohemian produces ten volumes. When his ambitions and sometimes arrogant plans met shipwreck, owing in general no doubt to his

own evil genius, he made new ones. Never handicapped by modesty or even the prudences of self-distrust, he was undeterred by obstacles and undismayed by misfortune. If he did not have a proud soul, at least his egotism conserved his identity unimpaired, even in the disintegration of his faculties, and to the last made the most of what his errors had left him. Next to his art it is his energy that by demonstrating his capacity distinguishes him and makes him a marked figure in our literature.

He had an English experience in impressionable school-boy days—which served him to real purpose in 'William Wilson', probably the solidest of his tales. But he never travelled, and in this respect he inevitably seems limited, even boyish, in comparison with many of his contemporaries. It is hardly necessary to say that this was a limitation he did not himself feel. But if his egotism amounted even to bumptiousness, as it did, it was naturally associated with great independence. He did his own thinking. He was constantly 'sizing up' everything, especially others, and could on this account alone hardly have been popular, even among the lowly spirited to whom arrogance and imperiousness, or even the caricature of those vices, seem not defects but qualities. They were especially evident, along with more amiable ones, in his criticism, which forms several volumes of his complete works, which he wrote more incisively, not to say more successfully, on the whole, than any of his few contemporary competitors, and for which he certainly showed the aptitudes of real penetration and a philosophic standpoint. He lacks, to be sure,

one of the chief qualifications of the critic, the critical temper. It is in his criticism that his journalism' appears most obviously. And his journalism was that of his day, the farthest possible removed from the critical temper. It has instead the polemic temper. And his polemic was extremely personal. Its tone is often extremely contemptuous. The lining, as the French say, of his praise is sometimes abuse of those who differ with him. His praise of Hawthorne is highly spiced with contempt for the neglect of Hawthorne that he charged upon New England. He felt the sectionalism of New England as of course no writer, not himself a New Englander, could fail to do. But he treats it with a self-answering excess in his references to 'the Emersons and Alcotts and Fullers'. His treatment of Longfellow is another instance. Longfellow is something of a quack himself, he says, but his reputation is what mainly strikes him, and this he thinks almost altogether due to the quackery of Longfellow's friendly environment. He makes elaborate accusations of plagiarism against him, and then at the conclusion of his philippic takes it all back or at all events whittles it down to a negligible point, with the obvious result, of course, of making his own article negligible. Perhaps he had not enough purpose to be called malevolent. He was rather irritable than imperious, perhaps, in his lack of any feeling of responsibility, in which case he must be acquitted of more malign motive than that of the strutting and consciously clever Ishmael bent on self-assertion. To call Carlyle an 'ass' and Emerson his imitator was but a way like another of calling attention to himself. So, possibly, were

his equally extravagant eulogies. Such primitive 'methods' were certainly more in vogue in his day than in ours. The journalism to which his work formally belonged or with which it had notable affiliations bristled with 'personalities', so-called. But Poe has claims inconsistent with the cloaking of his faults by the mantle of his time, and certainly no writer of his time, even, of anything like his powers wrote criticism of this particular order of simplicity. If it had been as prevalent as it was primitive we may be sure he would have avoided it in his consecration to 'originality' and aversion to custom and the common.

Cavilling came naturally to him. He began it early. It was perhaps the edge of his adolescent cleverness. 'I never heard him speak in terms of praise of any English writer living or dead' says a fellow cadet at West Point—testimony to a natural bent, at least. As he matured and began to write he necessarily modified it, but never beyond clear recognition. He was, in fact, rather better in its practice than when he varied it with eulogy. There is more truth, for example, in his remark about Carlyle, whom he did not in the least appreciate, that his manner 'is conventional—with himself', than in his characterization of Tennyson, whom he adored, as 'the greatest of all poets living or dead'. His laudation of the galaxy of female poets whose praises he sang so enthusiastically is ascribed by Stedman to his chivalry—an admission that he did not take either the sex or his function very seriously. And in truth his various judgments, favorable or other, are less trustworthy than those of any other critic of his general eminence. He could not have

learned much from his contemporaries here if, as he says, 'Our most analytic if not altogether our best critic (Mr. Whipple, perhaps, excepted) is Mr. William A. Jones'. And in fact, in his day criticism among us—and measurably in England—had even closer relations than it has to-day with the function discharged by professors of rhetoric and was rather elementary and of a hole-and-corner character. On the whole, it may be said that in spite of his penetration, which was keen within narrow enough limits, he indulged his propensity to personal irresponsibility rather more than less in his criticism than in his tales and—naturally—much more than in his poems; yet that on the other hand his criticism shows incidentally the same alert mental activity and intellectual curiosity.

His mental activity was indeed extraordinary—so much so as apparently to be deemed by him almost an end in itself. To what purpose or upon what substance his mind was engaged was of small moment so long as it functioned. But to the fact that it did function so actively is probably due the specific excellence, as his penetration is the specific quality, of his criticism, namely, that like much of his fiction it is ratiocinative and neither canonical as so much past, nor impressionist as so much current, criticism is. He was dogmatic enough, and absurdly autocratic, but his dogmas were not conventions. On the other hand he had ideas about the matter in hand and did not 'recount the adventures of his soul among masterpieces'—though it is to be said that acknowledged masterpieces did not greatly interest his soul, to which they doubtless afforded too little polemic material. His

ideas were often mere notions. With his theoretic bent they could hardly be otherwise. But in form, at least, they were conspicuously rationalized. Reasons with him were as plenty as blackberries. He delighted, in French phrase, to *remuer* them —fussily, perhaps, rather than profoundly and largely, no doubt, by way of what he himself calls 'kicking up a bobbery', but energetically and unceasingly. And though whistling as one goes even from excess instead of want of thought is still only whistling, nevertheless the phenomena of so much mental activity occupied with something quite other than Transcendentalism, exalting beauty to the point of declaring its incompatibility with truth, must have been interesting in his day. In fact it still has a certain piquancy. But his reasons were not the fruit of inquiry. They were 'immediately beheld' justifications of his preferences, and his mental furniture was not rich enough for the production of any *a priori* reflections of range and moment. He never speculated as Balzac, in similar case, observing: 'There must be a cause for this singularity'. He was only too pleased to rest in the singularity, to establish and flaunt it. He was much impressed by the saying he cites more than once from 'Lord Verulam': 'There is no exquisite beauty which has not some strangeness in its proportion', but he does not press the matter further, and is too content to get authority for 'strangeness' —which was precisely his affair—to appreciate that its service as an accent does not involve its value as an element even, to say nothing of his own practice of enforcing its predominance as a factor. The portion of his reasoning that—naturally—has

most interest is that concerned with linguistic technic. He would have made a stimulating professor of prosody, in spite of his 'crochets', as Stedman calls them, and his extravagance is in this field altogether more suggestive than in any other.

VII

He had, in short, a fine mind which he neither disciplined, nor stored, nor developed; the unusual activity of which was stimulated and guided by intellectual curiosity; of which invention and logic were more marked traits than imagination and poetic feeling; and of which he made effective but unscrupulous usage to no particular purpose. There is nothing very sinister in Poe, except the desire to produce sinister effects. And since these, as I have said, are apt to fail through the obviousness of their motive and the crudity of their means, they leave a merely disagreeable and not a sinister, a morbid and perverse, not at all a satanic, impression of the genius they express, though it is undeniable that a good many of the tales recall Emerson's description of Mephistopheles: 'pure intellect applied—as always there is a tendency—to the service of the senses'. His literary and artistic far exceeded his personal temperament, and he had appetites rather than passions. His lack of sensuousness was agreeably accompanied by an apparently complete emancipation from the sensual. There is simply no sex in his writings, and was not in his life till he went completely to pieces. His unscrupulousness and indelicacies with regard to ways and means, to be sure, began early, but his attitude toward them, if it betrayed a ferocious egotism,

showed also the distinctly unmoral nature—the shallower side of the instinct for self-preservation, not its perversion. If he was a charlatan he never saw any harm in being one. The candor of his duplicity emulates sincerity. And he looked on literature as the adventurer views his field of operation, not as the enthusiast his cause or the regularly enlisted his profession—a fact wholly germane to any consideration of his success in it, quite apart from its bearing on the character of the man behind his writings.

His legend has grown curiously since his death. The reasons for it are of course largely romantic, personal rather than literary. He is distinctly so much the most, as to be almost the only, romantic figure of our literature; and his romantic interest has greatly influenced the critical estimate of his work. In the first place it has led to the production of an unusual amount of criticism of this. And this criticism has been increasingly favorable. His contemporaries took a much less extravagant view of it. For them there was less mystery about Poe himself and they entertained none of the illusions that time, instead of destroying, as usual, in Poe's case seems to have multiplied. Then, too, the appreciation of literary art has greatly increased with us—to an excess, at present, I think, that fairly matches our earlier provincialism. Moreover, the spirit of literary generosity, particularly abounding in America toward our own authors—our own *sommités* in all fields—touched by the hard fate and possible injustice which Poe endured and from which his personal reputation suffered in the eyes of his contemporaries and the succeeding gener-

ation, has tended to exalt his literary reputation, with no doubt the instinct that its exaltation may serve to excuse or at least obscure his infirmities. To his contemporaries Poe was a man and a writer like another, to be measured by his performance. To subsequent critics he gradually came to appear as unique in a literature especially in need of the element he represents. And now it is difficult to judge him in the interests of truth without a melancholy consciousness of disloyalty to tradition. To recall once more Sainte-Beuve's serviceable remark to Arnold about Lamartine; 'he was important to *us*'. A spot of scarlet in a monotone of subdued hues, he naturally, as we got further and further away from his time, came more and more to rivet the attention which on closer scrutiny it appears he does not repay.

His reputation among us has notoriously been greatly increased by foreign recognition of his writings. If, say his admirers, we ourselves esteem him because he is an American writer, this cannot be true of his foreign estimation; quite the contrary. This is certainly plausible. But foreign recognition sets such traps for our naïveté that it is prudent to be a little on our guard in the presence of it. The theory that the foreign estimate previsages posterity's is open to some question—aside from the fact that posterity itself may make mistakes; Aldrich, for example, acutely argued from Browning's obscurity the probable injustice of posterity, preoccupied with obscurities of its own, to his incontestable merits. But foreign recognition in the nature of the case rewards to a disproportionate extent the merits that especially appeal to foreigners. If, as Arnold held, Sainte-Beuve could

regard Lamartine as important to the French without implying a positive in this relative importance, it is equally true that an exotic may make an appeal out of all proportion to its intrinsic value and interest. In any event we ought to distinguish between foreign recognition of those of our writers who are classifiable with foreign ones and this recognition when it rewards with its irresponsible applause the exceptional and extravagant which appeal to its interest in the novel and the foreign *per se*. As a matter of fact foreign recognition has been most generous with regard to many of our, to us, least indispensable writers. To put the matter crudely, the appreciative foreigner has admirable writers of his own; what he most appreciates in our literature is the queer, the odd, the qualities from whose associated defects he feels an entire detachment. Foreign recognition therefore in the case of Poe's extravaganzas and caprices is not necessarily an *imprimatur* of the same authority as it is in such instances as those of Cooper and Longfellow, for example. It attests not the merit but the extraordinariness of his writings, and a little, no doubt, the extraordinariness of their being produced in America. Gautier's reference to him, besides classing him with Mrs. Radcliffe and 'Monk' Lewis, is chiefly depreciation of his environment. And in France, at least, his sponsors were not, as in the case of Cooper, Balzac, and Sainte-Beuve, the foremost of Continental authorities at the time, one may say, but the genial and good-natured Gautier, who was preaching the gospel of romanticism *à outrance*, and Baudelaire, as to whose authority Swinburne's praise and the current rediscovery of him by the

dilettanti, mainly of Swinburne's speech, are disconcertingly at variance with his treatment by the austere Scherer, our own catholic Henry James, and the trenchant but impartial Faguet, perhaps the first of living French critics, in whose admirable 'Literary History of France' his name does not appear. It is also worth bearing in mind—since prudence in such a matter is, as I say, commendable—that Baudelaire, whom Mr. James cruelly calls Poe's inferior both as a charlatan and as a genius, had nevertheless an even greater purely linguistic genius than Poe's, and that the beauty of his translation, in itself celebrated, has been an appreciable element in Poe's Continental vogue. In France, in fact, our 'world-author's' stories appear as a part of Baudelaire's complete works.

Besides the foreign appreciation, Poe's fame has been forwarded by enjoying the favor of those who take what may be called the professional—or perhaps one may say more definitely nowadays the professorial—view of letters. This is somewhat different from that of the disinterested lover of literature, who is less concerned about classification. Tracing the tendencies and recording the phases of literary evolution, especially in a society so uniform, and with a history so short as ours, is a work in which accents of any sharpness must, one would say, be so acceptable as to be magnified out of sheer gratitude. The pleasures of classification are simpler, as well as less arduous, than those of characterization, and any intensification of their pursuit must be particularly welcome. A crisp note, a vivid patch of color, a definite *point de repère* in American literary history can but be so prized by

the literary historian as to acquire in his treatment a relief somewhat independent of its intrinsic quality. Poe is the nucleus of romanticism in American letters, and in addition to his indubitable importance thus in supplying a 'note' we might otherwise have lacked, he has in consequence acquired, from the literary historians and the critics who take their cue from them, an adventitious aspect of real and intrinsic importance as well. And this verdict has naturally been relied on by the extremely *un*-professional many who possess those 'primitive tastes' to which, says Mr. James—decidedly our most competent critical authority in such a matter—Poe particularly appeals. After the edition of his writings by the late Mr. Stedman and Professor Woodberry, one can hardly see how they could do otherwise. This piece of editing is one of the most distinguished examples of its art and a monument in which American letters has excellent reason for taking a genuine satisfaction. There is an adequate 'Memoir' condensed with additions by Professor Woodberry from his admirable 'Life'. There are three 'introductions'—to the tales, the criticism, and the poems, respectively—beautifully written by the elder editor, marked and catholic contributions to American critical literature, not quite convincing, I am of course bound to think, but of far finer flavor than is often to be found in the rather Barmecide banquest they preface; yet for this feast every scrap of Poe's writings has been collected, collated, and commented with an opulence of apparatus unsurpassed by that arranged for Shakespeare by Furness, for Bacon by Spedding, or for Milton by Masson.

The cult of Poe is not in the interests of literature, since as literature his writings are essentially valueless. The interests of literature occasionally call for restraint in the indulgence of Swinburne's 'generous pleasure of praising', not for the purpose—quite as frequent with Swinburne—of alternating with it the delights of censure and reprehension, but in order to maintain unobscured and unimpaired the standards of literature itself. Literature has a stronger claim than any of its practitioners, and generously or ungenerously to exalt these at its expense is to belittle and betray it. Hardly any cause is nobler and treason to few so flagrant or—since the pleasure of praising *is*, like most prodigalities perhaps, a generous one—so frequent. But there is a particular irrationality in American over-praise of Poe. It is this: unlike foreign literatures and English literature as a whole, American literature—as it is, perhaps fatuously but nevertheless conveniently, not to say inevitably, called—has no background. Its figures do not form part of a pageant relieved against a rich and varied scenic setting, but stand in silhouette before the black 'drop' that isolates rather than supports them and focuses attention on their individualities, from the stately lyceum lecturer like Emerson to the genial 'song and dance artist', in all strictness too numerous to mention. Lacking—within our own exclusively American ranks, I repeat—ancestors and traditions, we are without the restrictive influences of a 'stream of tendency', an orderly evolution, without that subconscious education which saves conscious intelligence so much unintelligent performance. Our protestant and innovating

temperaments have really nothing to protest against, nothing to break away from, no routine to vivify. More than that, we have, comparatively speaking, nothing to maintain, nothing to keep in mind, no standards in a word. Such a romanticist as Gautier, with the whole heritage of the noble seventeenth and the enlightened eighteenth century French literature in his literary blood, could safely practice and preach the literary freedom which with us means license—and consequent insignificance. No romantic artist can do more than 'pad round' the skeleton he must have derived from his predecessors—at least in our day, the human imagination on which he leans having been so long at work. Our realists are in better case—nature being inexhaustible. Hence our disposition to magnify our extravagant and capricious writers—such as Poe and Whitman—is destructive of our holds on the standards which it is of the last importance for us to keep in mind, since so only can we have them in mind at all. Only an older society than ours can with impunity cherish and coddle 'les jeunes', who with us are merely out of the ranks, however bravely we may imagine them at the head of the procession.

It is true that the cult of Poe is, as I have said, largely dependent for its persistence on the Poe legend, and the legend is concerned with his life which was romance itself and not his writings which are considerably its caricature. But his life was quite as abnormal as his writings. Beyond doubt it is largely to be charged with the failures and shortcomings of these, as well as, like them, lacking itself, however pitiful and pathetic, the elements of

permanent interest. 'Through the storms and tempests of his furious mind', says Thackeray of Swift in a memorable passage, 'the stars of religion and love break out in the blue, shining serenely though hidden by the driving clouds and maddened hurricane of his life.' We cannot write of Poe in this vein. His powers were of a surety not comparable with Swift's, but what prevents his tragedy from being relatively as impressive is its fatal lack of dignity. And its lack of dignity is due not to his errors and the payment they exacted, but to himself. There is a tragic pathos in the ruin wrought by the empire of anodyne over the victim of an abnormal nervous organization, that couples it not unworthily with madness itself. But it is not Poe's gloomy life and its ghastly conclusion, apt extinction of a genius already honeycombed with demoralization, that robs his figure of dignity and alloys the awfulness of his fate. It is his own character—his own predetermined organization, if one chooses. In spite of his personal charm, his was a baleful spirit. For him the stars of religion do not break out in the blue. Spiritually, he lacked ideality. His *indignatio* is not *saeva*, but fretful, jealous, egotist. He had no religion, in which respect he is marked among poets and romancers. Of course I do not refer to theology, but he had no sense of awe. The sense of awe was a plaything with him. It never mastered him. He used it as one of the tools of his trade—to create his effects, to harrow his readers' nerves. His attitude toward awe in fact is essentially blasphemous; he does not mock it, but he is impervious to its influence and handles it with the impunity of moral insulation. 'My whole nature', he affirms, 'utterly

revolts at the idea that there is any being in the Universe superior to myself.' Like a soulless Undine, he is on this account quite outside of our instinctive, and appeals only to our imaginative, sympathies.

It is people's imagination that has made him what popularly he seems—something quite other than the reality. The star of love did gleam fitfully for him in the frigid ether that was his sky. His love for Virginia was his one external stimulus, the only magnet of his errant course, the sole unselfish indulgence of a nature otherwise in galling bondage to egotism. His devotion to her, however, signal as it is in contrast to his habitual self-concentration, was apparently chivalrous rather than passionate. Mrs. Clemm shared it in a large measure, as her own adoring affection and practical care richly entitled her to do. And, essential element of every relation as chivalry is, it is not ideally adequate in the sphere of the affections—where it needs the supplement of self-surrender. In Poe's case, too, as the days became darker and darker it suffered some strain, as 'Ulalume' perhaps attests. If so, though the most hauntingly mournful of any of his poems, its burden is characteristically unremorseful. Compare it with the passionate regrets of Carlyle's 'Reminiscences', the wild contrition of a far from loving nature. And it may aptly be remembered with regard to the various 'affairs' of Poe's last years that he had already added opium to alcohol, and was the prey of vagrom impulses rather than of any profound and sincere, however transient, passion. This is at once their superficial excuse and their fundamental indictment, but in any event they serve to deepen one's sense of his

lack of resource and illumination in love as well as in that general spiritual aspiration we call religion. The lack of dignity in his career from its beginning to its close, in spite of his pretensions, his arrogance and his abounding egotism, estranges sympathy as well as admiration and prevents the gloom of his wretchedness from obscuring in any effective way the comparative valuelessness of his work. His errors and misfortunes are only to be understood probably from the point of view of pathology. From this point of view they must arouse a deep compassion and one intelligent enough to ascribe the futility of much of his work to the fated frustration of his extraordinary powers. But it is the tragedy of American letters that the one absolute artist of our elder literature should, in any marked degree, require a chivalrous, rather than requite a critical, justification.

IRVING BABBITT

1865–

ROMANTIC MELANCHOLY[1] (1919)

Rousseau and his early followers—especially perhaps his early French followers—were very much preoccupied with the problem of happiness. Now in a sense all men—even those who renounce the world and mortify the flesh—aim at happiness. The important point to determine is what any particular person means by happiness and how he hopes to attain it. It should be plain from all that has been said that the Rousseauist seeks happiness in the free play of the emotions. The 'Influence of the Passions on Happiness' is the significant title of one of Madame de Staël's early treatises. The happiness that the Rousseauist seeks involves not merely a free play of feeling but—what is even more important—a free play of the imagination. Feeling acquires a sort of infinitude as a result of this coöperation of the imagination, and so the romanticist goes, as we have seen, in quest of the thrill superlative, as appears so clearly in his nympholepsy, his pursuit of the 'impossible she'. But the more imaginative this quest for emotional happiness grows the more it tends to become a mere nostalgia. Happiness is achieved, so far as it is achieved at all, in dreamland. Rousseau says of himself: *Mon plus constant bonheur fut en songe.* Every finite satisfaction, by the very fact that it is

[1] Reprinted from *Rousseau and Romanticism* by permission of, and by arrangement with, Houghton Mifflin Co.

finite, leaves him unsatisfied. René says that he had exhausted solitude as he had exhausted society: they had both failed to satisfy his insatiable desires. René plainly takes his insatiableness to be the badge of his spiritual distinction. To submit to any circumscribing of one's desires is to show that one has no sense of infinitude and so to sink to the level of the philistine.

But does one become happy by being nostalgic and hyperaesthetic, by burning with infinite indeterminate desire? We have here perhaps the chief irony and contradiction in the whole movement. The Rousseauist seeks happiness and yet, on his own showing, his mode of seeking it results, not in happiness, but in wretchedness. One finds indeed figures in the nineteenth century, a Browning, for example, who see in life first of all an emotional adventure and then carry this adventure through to the end with an apparently unflagging gusto. One may affirm nevertheless that a movement which began by asserting the goodness of man and the loveliness of nature ended by producing the greatest literature of despair the world has ever seen. No movement has perhaps been so prolific of melancholy as emotional romanticism. To follow it from Rousseau down to the present day is to run through the whole gamut of gloom.[1]

> Infections of unutterable sadness,
> Infections of incalculable madness,
> Infections of incurable despair.

According to a somewhat doubtful authority, Ninon de Lenclos, 'the joy of the spirit measures

[1] In his *Mal romantique* (1908) E. Seillière labels the

its force'. When the romanticist on the other hand discovers that his ideal of happiness works out into actual unhappiness he does not blame his ideal. He simply assumes that the world is unworthy of a being so exquisitely organized as himself, and so shrinks back from it and enfolds himself in his sorrow as he would in a mantle. Since the superlative bliss that he craves eludes him he will at least be superlative in woe. So far from being a mark of failure this woe measures his spiritual grandeur. 'A great soul', as René says, 'must contain more grief than a small one.' The romantic poets enter into a veritable competition with one another as to who shall be accounted the most forlorn. The victor in this competition is awarded the palm not merely for poetry but for wisdom. In the words of Arnold:

> Amongst us one
> Who most has suffered, takes dejectedly
> His seat upon the intellectual throne;
> And all his store of sad experience he
> Lays bare of wretched days.
> Tells us his misery's birth and growth and signs,
> And how the dying spark of hope was fed,
> And how the breast was soothed, and how the head,
> And all his hourly varied anodynes.

generations that have elapsed since the rise of Rousseauism as follows:

1. Sensibility (*Nouvelle Héloïse*, 1761).
2. Weltschmerz (Schiller's *Æsthetic Letters*, 1795).
3. Mal du siècle (Hugo's *Hernani*, 1830).
4. Pessimism (vogue of Schopenhauer and Stendhal, 1865).
5. Neurasthenia (culmination of *fin de siècle* movement, 1900).

This for our wisest! and we others pine,
And wish the long unhappy dream would end,
And waive all claim to bliss, and try to bear,
With close-lipped patience for our only friend,
Sad patience, too near neighbor to despair.

Though Arnold may in this poem, as some one has complained, reduce the muse to the role of hospital nurse, he is, like his master Senancour, free from the taint of theatricality. He does not, as he said of Byron, make 'a pageant of his bleeding heart'; and the Byronic pose has a close parallel in the pose of Chateaubriand. An Irish girl at London once told Chateaubriand that 'he carried his heart in a sling'. He himself said that he had a soul of the kind 'the ancients called a sacred malady'.

Chateaubriand, to be sure, had his cheerful moments and many of them. His sorrows he bestowed upon the public. Herein he was a true child of Jean-Jacques. We are told by eye-witnesses how heartily Rousseau enjoyed many aspects of his life at Motiers-Travers. On his own showing, he was plunged during this period in almost unalloyed misery. Froude writes of Carlyle: 'It was his peculiarity that if matters were well with himself, it never occurred to him that they could be going ill with any one else; and, on the other hand, if he was uncomfortable, he required everybody to be uncomfortable along with him.' We can follow clear down to Gissing the assumption in some form or other that 'art must be the mouthpiece of misery'. This whole question as to the proper function of art goes to the root of the debate between the classicist and the Rousseauist. 'All

these poets', Goethe complains to Eckermann of the romanticists of 1830, 'write as though they were ill, and as though the whole world were a hospital. . . . Every one of them in writing tries to be more desolate than all the others. This is really an abuse of poetry, which has been given to make man satisfied with the world and with his lot. But the present generation is afraid of all solid energy; its mind is at ease and sees poetry only in weakness. I have found a good expression to vex these gentlemen. I am going to call their poetry hospital poetry.'[1]

Now Goethe is here, like Chateaubriand, mocking to some degree his own followers. When he suffered from a spiritual ailment of any kind he got rid of it by inoculating others with it; and it was in this way, as we learn from his Autobiography, that he got relief from the *Weltschmerz* of 'Werther'. But later in life Goethe was classical not merely in precept, like Chateaubriand, but to some extent in practice. The best of the poetry of his maturity tends, like that of the ancients, to elevate and console.

The contrast between classic and romantic poetry in this matter of melancholy is closely bound up with the larger contrast between imitation and spontaneity. Homer is the greatest of poets, according to Aristotle, because he does not entertain us with his own person but is more than any other poet an imitator. The romantic poet writes, on the other hand, as Lamartine says he wrote, solely for the 'relief of his heart'. He pours forth himself—his most intimate and private self; above all, his anguish and his tears. In his relation to his reader,

[1] *Eckermann*, September 24, 1827.

as Musset tells us in a celebrated image,[1] he is like the pelican who rends and lacerates his own flesh to provide nourishment for his young ('Pour toute nourriture il apporte son cœur'):

> Les plus désespérés sont les chants les plus beaux,
> Et j'en sais d'immortels qui sont de purs sanglots.[2]

To make of poetry a spontaneous overflow of powerful emotion, usually of sorrowful emotion, is what the French understand by lyricism (*le lyrisme*); and it may be objected that it is not fair to compare an epic poet like Homer with a lyricist like Musset. Let us then take for our comparison the poet whom the ancients themselves looked upon as the supreme type of the lyricist—Pindar. He is superbly imaginative, 'sailing', as Gray tells us, 'with supreme dominion through the azure deep of air', but his imagination is not, like that of Musset, in the service of sensibility. He does not bestow his own emotions upon us, but is rather, in the Aristotelian sense, an imitator. He is indeed at the very opposite pole from Rousseau and the 'apostles of affliction'. 'Let a man', he says, 'not darken delight in his life.' 'Disclose not to strangers our burden of care; this at least shall I advise thee. Therefore is it fitting to show openly to all the folk the fair and pleasant things allotted us; but if any baneful misfortune sent of heaven befalleth man, it is seemly to shroud this in darkness.'[3] And one

[1] See *La Nuit de Mai*.

[2] These lines are inscribed on the statue of Musset in front of the Théâtre Français. Cf. Shelley:

Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.

[3] Translation by J. E. Sandys of fragment cited in Stobaeus, *Flor.* CIX. 1.

should also note Pindar's hostility towards that other great source of romantic lyricism—nostalgia ('The desire of the moth for the star'), and the closely allied pursuit of the strange and the exotic. He tells of the condign punishment visited by Apollo upon the girl Coronis, who became enamoured of 'a strange man from Arcadia', and adds: 'She was in love with things remote—that passion which many ere now have felt. For among men there is a foolish company of those who, putting shame on what they have at home, cast their glances afar, and pursue idle dreams in hopes that shall not be fulfilled.' [1]

We are not to suppose that Pindar was that most tiresome and superficial of all types—the professional optimist who insists on inflicting his 'gladness' upon us. 'The immortals', he says, 'apportion to man two sorrows for every boon they grant.' [2] In general, the Greek whom Kipling sings and whom we already find in Schiller—the Greek who is an incarnation of the 'joy of life unquestioned, the everlasting wondersong of youth' [3]—is a romantic myth. We read in the *Iliad*: [4] 'Of all the creatures that breathe or crawl upon the earth, none is more wretched than man.' Here is the 'joy of life unquestioned' in Homer. Like Homer the best of the later Greeks and Romans face unflinchingly the facts of life, and these facts do not encourage a thoughtless elation. Their melancholy is even more concerned with the lot of man in general than with their personal and private grief. The quality of this melancholy is rendered in Tennyson's line on

[1] *Pythian Odes*, III. 20 ff. [2] *Ibid.*, III. 81–2.
[3] 'Song of the Banjo', in *The Seven Seas*.
[4] XVII. 446–7.

Virgil, one of the finest in nineteenth-century English poetry:

> Thou majestic in thy sadness at the doubtful doom of human kind.[1]

One should indeed not fail to distinguish between the note of melancholy in a Homer or a Virgil and the melancholy of the ancients, whether Stoic or Epicurean, who had experienced the hopelessness and helplessness of a pure naturalism in dealing with ultimate problems. The melancholy of the Stoic is the melancholy of the man who associates with the natural order a 'virtue' that the natural order does not give, and so is tempted to exclaim at last with Brutus, that he had thought virtue a thing and had found that it was only a word. The melancholy of the Epicurean is that of the man who has tasted the bitter sediment (*amari aliquid*) in the cup of pleasure. It is not difficult to discover modern equivalents of both Stoic and Epicurean melancholy. 'One should seek', says Sainte-Beuve, 'in the pleasures of René the secret of his *ennuis*,' and so far as this is true Chateaubriand is on much the same level as some Roman voluptuary who suffered from the *taedium vitae* in the time of Tiberius or Nero.[2] But though the Roman decadent gave himself up to the pursuit of sensation,

[1] A brief survey of melancholy among the Greeks will be found in Professor S. H. Butcher's *Some Aspects of the Greek Genius*.

[2] The exasperated quest of novelty is one of the main traits both of the ancient and the modern victim of ennui. See Seneca, *De Tranquillitate animi:* 'Fastidio illis esse coepit vita, et ipse mundus; et subit illud rabidorum deliciarum: quousque eadem?' (Cf. La Fontaine: Il me faut du nouveau, n'en fût-il plus au monde.)

and often of violent and abnormal sensation, he was less prone than a Chateaubriand to associate this pursuit with the 'infinite'; and so he was less nostalgic and hyperaesthetic. His Epicureanism was therefore less poetical no doubt, but on the other hand he did not set up mere romantic restlessness as a sort of substitute for religion. It was probably easier therefore for him to feel the divine discontent and so turn to real religion than it would have been if he had, like the Rousseauist, complicated his Epicureanism with sham spirituality.

To say that the melancholy even of the decadent ancient is less nostalgic is perhaps only another way of saying what I have said about the melancholy of the ancients in general—that it is not so purely personal. It derives less from his very private and personal illusions and still less from his very private and personal disillusions. In its purely personal quality romantic melancholy is indeed inseparable from the whole conception of original genius. The genius sets out not merely to be unique, but unique in feeling, and the sense of uniqueness in feeling speedily passes over into that of uniqueness in suffering—on the principle no doubt laid down by Horace Walpole, that life, which is a comedy for those who think, is a tragedy for those who feel. To be a beautiful soul, to preserve one's native goodness of feeling among men who have been perverted by society, is to be the elect of nature, and yet this election turns out, as Rousseau tells us, to be a 'fatal gift of heaven'. It is only the disillusioned romanticist, however, who assumes this elegiac tone. We need to consider what he means by happiness while he still seeks for it in

the actual world and not in the *pays des chimères*. Rousseau tells us that he based the sense of his own worth on the fineness of his powers of perception. Why should nature have endowed him with such exquisite faculties[1] if he was not to have a satisfaction commensurate with them, if he was 'to die without having lived'? We have here the psychological origins of the right to happiness that the romanticists were to proclaim. 'We spend on the passions', says Joubert, 'the stuff that has been given us for happiness.' The Rousseauist hopes to find his happiness in the passions themselves. Romantic happiness does not involve any moral effort and has been defined in its extreme forms as a 'monstrous dream of passive enjoyment'. Flaubert has made a study of the right to happiness thus understood in his 'Madame Bovary'. Madame Bovary, who is very commonplace in other respects, feels exquisitely; and, inasmuch as her husband had no such fineness, the right to happiness meant for her, as it did for so many other 'misunderstood' women, the right to extramarital adventure. One should note the germs of melancholy that lurk in the quest of the superlative moment even if the quest is relatively successful. Suppose Saint-Preux had succeeded in compressing into a single instant 'the delights of a thousand centuries'; and so far as outer circumstances are concerned had had to pay no penalty. The nearer the approach to a super-

[1] 'A quoi bon m'avoir fait naître avec des facultés exquises pour les laisser jusqu'à la fin sans emploi? Le sentiment de mon prix interne en me donnant celui de cette injustice m'en dédommageait en quelque sorte, et me faisait verser des larmes que j'aimais à laisser couler.' *Confessions*, Livre IX (1756).

human intensity of feeling the greater is likely to be the ensuing languor. The ordinary round of life seems pale and insipid compared with the exquisite and fugitive moment. One seems to one's self to have drained the cup of life at a draught and, save perhaps for impassioned recollection of the perfect moment, to have no reason for continuing to live. One's heart is 'empty and swollen'[1] and one is haunted by thoughts of suicide.

This sense of having exhausted life[2] and the accompanying temptation to suicide that are such striking features of the malady of the age are not necessarily associated with any other enjoyment at all. One may devour life in revery and then the melancholy arises from the disproportion between the dream and the fact. The revery that thus consumes life in advance is not necessarily erotic. What may be termed the cosmic revery of a Senancour or an Amiel[3] has very much the same effect.

The atony and aridity of which the sufferer from romantic melancholy complains may have other sources besides the depression that follows upon the achieving of emotional intensity whether in revery or in fact; it may also be an incident in the warfare between head and heart that assumes so many forms among the spiritual posterity of Jean-Jacques. The Rousseauist seeks happiness in emotional spontaneity and this spontaneity seems to be killed by the head which stands aloof and

[1] *Nouvelle Héloïse*, Pt. VI, Lettre VIII.

[2] 'Encore enfant par la tête, vous êtes déjà vieux par le cœur.' *Ibid.*

[3] See the examples quoted in Arnold, *Essays in Criticism* Second Series, 305–6.

dissects and analyzes. Perhaps the best picture of the emotionalist who is thus incapacited for a frank surrender to his own emotions is the 'Adolphe' of Benjamin Constant (a book largely reminiscent of Constant's actual affair with Madame de Staël).

Whether the victim of romantic melancholy feels or analyzes, he is equally incapable of action. He who faces resolutely the rude buffetings of the world is gradually hardened against them. The romantic movement is filled with the groans of those who have evaded action and at the same time become highly sensitive and highly self-conscious. The man who thrills more exquisitely to pleasure than another will also thrill more exquisitely to pain; nay, pleasure itself in its extreme is allied to pain;[1] so that to be hyperaesthetic is not an unmixed advantage, especially if it be true, as Pindar says, that the Gods bestow two trials on a man for every boon. Perhaps the deepest bitterness is found, not in those who make a pageant of their bleeding hearts, but in those who, like Leconte de Lisle[2] and others (*les impassibles*), disdain to

[1] This is the thought of Keats's *Ode to Melancholy:*

Ay, in the very temple of Delight
Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine,
Though seen of none save him whose strenuous tongue
Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine.

Cf. Chateaubriand: *Essai sur les Révolutions*, Pt. II, ch. LVII: 'Ces jouissances sont trop poignantes: telle est notre faiblesse, que les plaisirs exquis deviennent des douleurs', &c.

[2] See his sonnet *Les Montreurs*. This type of Rousseauist is anticipated by 'Milord' Bomston in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Rousseau directed the engraver to depict him with 'un maintien grave et stoïque sous lequel il cache avec peine une extrême sensibilité'.

make a show of themselves to the mob, and so dissimulate their quivering sensibility under an appearance of impassibility; or, like Stendal, under a mask of irony that 'is imperceptible to the vulgar'.

Stendhal aims not at emotional intensity only, but also glorifies the lust for power. He did as much as any one in his time to promote the ideal of the superman. Yet even if the superman has nerves of steel, as seems to have been the case with Stendhal's favorite, Napoleon, and acts on the outer world with a force of which the man in search of a sensation is quite incapable, he does not act upon himself, he remains ethically passive. This ethical passivity is the trait common to all those who incline to live purely on the naturalistic level—whether they sacrifice the human law and its demands for measure to the lust of knowledge or the lust of sensation or the lust of power. The man who neglects his ethical self and withdraws into his temperamental or private self, must almost necessarily have the sense of isolation, of remoteness from other men. We return here to the psychology of the original genius to whom it was a tame and uninteresting thing to be simply human, and who, disdaining to seem to others a being of the same clay as themselves, wished to be in their eyes either an angel or a demon—above all a demon.[1] René does not, as I have said, want even

[1] 'Qui es-tu? À coup sûr tu n'es pas un être pétri du même limon et animé de la même vie que nous! Tu es un ange ou un démon mais tu n'es pas une créature humaine.... Pourquoi habiter parmi nous, qui ne pouvons te suffire ni te comprendre?' G. Sand, *Lélia*, I. 11.

the woman who loves him to feel at one with him, but rather to be at once astonished and appalled. He exercises upon those who approach him a malign fascination; for he not only lives in misery himself as in his natural element, but communicates this misery to those who approach him. He is like one of those fair trees under which one cannot sit without perishing. Moreover René disavows all responsibility for thus being a human Upas-tree. Moral effort is unavailing, for it was all written in the book of fate. The victim of romantic melancholy is at times tender and elegiac, at other times he sets up as a heaven-defying Titan. This latter pose became especially common in France around 1830, when the influence of Byron had been added to that of Chateaubriand. Under the influence of these two writers a whole generation of youth became 'things of dark imaginings',[1] predestined to a blight that was at the same time the badge of their superiority. One wished like René to have an 'immense, solitary and stormy soul', and also, like a Byronic hero, to have a diabolical glint in the eye and a corpse-like complexion,[2] and so seem the 'blind and deaf agent of funereal mysteries'.[3] 'It was possible to believe everything about René except the truth.' The person who delights in being as mysterious as this easily falls into mystifi-

[1] See *Lara*, XVIII, XIX, perhaps the best passage that can be quoted for the Byronic hero.

[2] Cf. Gautier, *Histoire du romantisme:* 'Il était de mode alors dans l'école romantique d'être pâle, livide, verdâtre, un peu cadavéreux, s'il était possible. Cela donnait l'air fatal, byronien, giaour, dévoré par les passions et les remords'.

[3] Hugo, *Hernani*.

cation. Byron himself, we are told, was rather flattered by the rumor that he had committed at least one murder. Baudelaire, it has been said, displayed his moral gangrene as a warrior might display honourable wounds. This flaunting of his own perversity was part of the literary attitude he had inherited from the 'Satanic School'.

When the romanticist is not posing as the victim of fate he poses as the victim of society. Both ways of dodging moral responsibility enter into the romantic legend of the *poète maudit*. Nobody loves a poet. His own mother, according to Baudelaire, utters a malediction upon him.[1] That is because the poet feels so exquisitely that he is at once odious and unintelligible to the ordinary human pachyderm. Inasmuch as the philistine is not too sensitive to act he has a great advantage over the poet in the real world and often succeeds in driving him from it and indeed from life itself. This inferiority in action is a proof of the poet's ideality. 'His gigantic wings', as Baudelaire says, 'keep him from walking.' He has, in Coleridgean phrase, fed on 'honey dew and drunk the milk of paradise',[2]

[1] Lorsque, par un décret des puissances suprêmes,
Le Poète apparaît dans ce monde ennuyé,
Sa mère épouvantée et pleine de blasphèmes
Crispe ses poings vers Dieu, qui la prend en pitié.
Fleurs du mal: Bénédiction.

Cf. *Nouvelle Héloïse*, Pt. III, Lettre XXVI:
'Ciel inexorable! . . . O ma mère, pourquoi vous donna-t-il un fils dans sa colère?'

[2] Coleridge has a side that relates him to the author of *Les Fleurs du mal*. In his *Pains of Sleep* he describes a dream in which he felt

Desire with loathing strangely mix'd,
On wild or hateful objects fix'd.

and so can scarcely be expected to submit to a diet of plain prose. It is hardly necessary to say that great poets of the past have not been at war with their public in this way. The reason is that they were less taken up with the uttering of their own uniqueness; they were, without ceasing to be themselves, servants of the general sense.

Chatterton became for the romanticists a favorite type of the *poète maudit*, and his suicide a symbol of the inevitable defeat of the 'ideal' by the 'real'. The first performance of Vigny's 'Chatterton' (1835), with its picture of the implacable hatred of the philistine for the artist, was received by the romantic youth of Paris with something akin to delirium. As Gautier says in his well-known account of this performance, one could almost hear in the night the crack of the solitary pistols. The ordinary man of letters, says Vigny in his preface to this play, is sure of success, even the great writer may get a hearing, but the poet, a being who is on a far higher level than either, can look forward only to 'perpetual martyrdom and immolation'. He comes into the world to be a burden to others; his native sensibility is so intimate and profound that it 'has plunged him from childhood into involuntary ecstasies, interminable reveries, infinite inventions. Imagination possesses him above all . . . it sweeps his faculties heavenward as irresistibly as the balloon carries up its car'. From that time forth he is more or less cut off from normal contact with his fellowmen. 'His sensibility has become too keen; what only grazes other men wounds him until he bleeds.' He is thrown back more and more upon himself and becomes a sort of living volcano,

'consumed by secret ardors and inexplicable languors', and incapable of self-guidance. Such is the poet. From his first appearance he is an outlaw. Let all your tears and all your pity be for him. If he is finally forced to suicide, not he but society is to blame. He is like the scorpion that cruel boys surround with live coals and that is finally forced to turn his sting upon himself. Society therefore owes it to itself to see that this exquisite being is properly pensioned and protected by government, to the end that idealism may not perish from the earth. M. Thiers, who was prime minister at that time, is said to have received a number of letters from young poets, the general tenor of which was: 'A position or I'll kill myself.' [1]

A circumstance that should interest Americans is that Poe as interpreted by Baudelaire came to hold for a later generation of romanticists the place that Chatterton had held for the romanticists of 1830. Poe was actually murdered, says Baudelaire —and there is an element of truth in the assertion along with much exaggeration—by this great gaslighted barbarity (i.e., America). All his inner and spiritual life, whether drunkard's or poet's, was one constant effort to escape from this antipathetic

[1] Keats, according to Shelley, was an example of the *poète maudit*. 'The poor fellow', he says, 'was literally hooted from the stage of life.' Keats was, as a matter of fact, too sturdy to be snuffed out by an article and had less of the quivering Rousseauistic sensibility than Shelley himself. Cf. letter of Shelley to Mrs. Shelley (Aug. 7, 1820): 'Imagine my despair of good, imagine how it is possible that one of so weak and sensitive a nature as mine can run further the gauntlet through this hellish society of men.'

atmosphere 'in which', Baudelaire goes on to say, 'the impious love of liberty has given birth to a new tyranny, the tyranny of the beasts, a zoöcracy'; and in this human zoo a being with such a superhuman fineness of sensibility as Poe was of course at a hopeless disadvantage. In general our elation at Poe's recognition in Europe should be tempered by the reflection that this recognition is usually taken as a point of departure for insulting America. Poe is about the only hyperaesthetic romanticist we have had, and he therefore fell in with the main European tendency that comes down from the eighteenth century. Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, whom I have already cited as an extreme example of romantic idealism, was one of Poe's avowed followers; but Villiers is also related by his aesthetic and 'diabolic' Catholicism to Chateaubriand; and the religiosity of Chateaubriand itself derives from the religiosity of Rousseau.

Hitherto I have been studying for the most part only one main type of modern melancholy. This type, even in a Chateaubriand or a Byron and still more in their innumerable followers, may seem at once superficial and theatrical. It often does not get beyond that Epicurean toying with sorrow, that luxury of grief, which was not unknown even to classical antiquity.[1] The despair of Chateaubriand is frequently only a disguise of his love of literary glory, and Chesterton is inclined to see in the Byronic gloom an incident of youth and high

[1] Euripides speaks of the *Χάρις γόων* in his *Ἱκέτιδες* (Latin, 'dolendi voluptas'; German, 'die Wonne der Wehmut').

spirits.[1] But this is not the whole story even in Byron and Chateaubriand. To find what is both genuine and distinctive in romantic melancholy we need to enlarge a little further on the underlying difference between the classicist and the Rousseauist. The Rousseauist, as indeed the modern man in general, is more preoccupied with his separate and private self than the classicist. Modern melancholy has practically always this touch of isolation, not merely because of the proneness of the 'genius' to dwell on his own uniqueness, but also because of the undermining of the traditional communions by critical analysis. The noblest form of the 'malady of the age' is surely that which supervened upon the loss of religious faith. This is what distinguishes the sadness of an Arnold or a Senancour from that of a Gray. The *Elegy* belongs to the modern movement by the humanitarian note, the sympathetic interest in the lowly, but in its melancholy it does not go much beyond the milder forms of classical meditation on the inevitable sadness of life—what one may term pensiveness. Like the other productions of the so-called graveyard school, it bears a direct relation to Milton's *Il Penseroso*. It is well to retain Gray's own distinction. 'Mine

[1] Chesterton is anticipated in this paradox by Wordsworth:

> In youth we love the darksome lawn
> Brushed by the owlet's wing.
> Then Twilight is preferred to Dawn
> And autumn to the spring.
> Sad fancies do we then affect
> In luxury of disrespect
> To our own prodigal excess
> Of too familiar happiness.
> *Ode to Lycoris.*

is a white Melancholy, or rather Leucocholy for the most part,' he wrote to Richard West in 1742, 'but there is another sort, black indeed, which I have now and then felt.' Gray did not experience the more poignant sadness, one may suspect, without some loss of the 'trembling hope' that is the final note of the *Elegy*. No forlornness is greater than that of the man who has known faith and then lost it. Renan writes of his own break with the Church: 'The fish of Lake Baikal, we are told, have spent thousands of years in becoming fresh-water fish after being salt-water fish. I had to go through my transition in a few weeks. Like an enchanted circle, Catholicism embraces the whole of life with so much strength that when one is deprived of it everything seems insipid. I was terribly lost. The universe produced upon me the impression of a cold and arid desert. For, the moment that Christianity was not the truth, all the rest appeared to me indifferent, frivolous, barely worthy of interest. The collapse of my life upon itself left in me a feeling of emptiness like that which follows an attack of fever or an unhappy love-affair.'[1]

The forlornness at the loss of faith is curiously combined in many of the romanticists with the mood of revolt. This type of romanticist heaps reproaches on a God in whose existence he no longer believes (as in Leconte de Lisle's 'Quaïn', itself related to Byron's 'Gain'). He shakes his fist at an empty heaven, or like Alfred de Vigny (in his *Jardin des Oliviers*) assumes towards this emptiness an attitude of proud disdain. He is loath to give up this grandiose defiance of divinity if only be-

[1] *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse*, 329–30.

cause it helps to save him from subsiding into platitude. A somewhat similar mood appears in the 'Satanic' Catholics who continue to cling to religion simply because it adds to the gusto of sinning.[1] A Barbey succeeded in combining the role of Byronic Titan with that of champion of the Church. But in general the romantic Prometheus spurns the traditional forms of communion whether classical or Christian. He is, so far as everything established is concerned, enormously centrifugal, but he hopes to erect on the ruins of the past the new religion of human brotherhood. Everything in this movement, from Shaftesbury down, hinges on the role that is thus assigned to sympathy: if it can really unite men who are at the same time indulging each to the utmost his own 'genius' or idiosyncrasy, there is no reason why one should not accept romanticism as a philosophy of life.

But nowhere else perhaps is the clash more violent between the theory and the fact. No movement is so profuse in professions of brotherhood and none is so filled with the aching sense of solitude. 'Behold me then alone upon the earth,' is the sentence with which Rousseau begins his last book;[2] and he goes on to marvel that he, the 'most loving of men', had been forced more and more

[1] '[Villiers] était de cette famille des néo-catholiques littéraires dont Chateaubriand est le père commun, et qui a produit Barbey d'Aurévilly, Baudelaire et plus récemment M. Joséphin Peladan. Ceux-là ont goûté par-dessus tout dans la religion les charmes du péché, la grandeur du sacrilège, et leur sensualisme a caressé les dogmes qui ajoutaient aux voluptés la suprême volupté de se perdre.' Anatole France, *Vie Littéraire*, III. 121.

[2] *Première Promenade.*

into solitude. 'I am in the world as though in a strange planet upon which I have fallen from the one that I inhabited.' [1] When no longer subordinated to something higher than themselves, both the head and the heart (in the romantic sense) not only tend to be opposed to one another, but also, each in its own way, to isolate. Empedocles was used not only by Arnold but by other victims [2] of romantic melancholy, as a symbol of intellectual isolation: by his indulgence in the 'imperious lonely thinking power' Empedocles has broken the warm bonds of sympathy with his fellows:

> thou art
> A living man no more, Empedocles!
> Nothing but a devouring flame of thought,—
> But a naked eternally restless mind!

His leaping into Aetna typifies his attempt to escape from his loneliness by a fiery union with nature herself.

According to religion one should seek to unite with a something that is set above both man and nature, whether this something is called God as in Christianity or simply the Law as in various philosophies of the Far East.[3] The most severe penalty visited on the man who transgresses is that he tends to fall away from this union. This is the element of truth in the sentence of Diderot

[1] *Première Promenade.*

[2] E.g. Hölderlin and Jean Polonius.

[3] A striking passage on solitude will be found in the *Laws of Manu*, IV. 240–2. ('Alone a being is born: alone he goes down to death.' His kin forsake him at the grave; his only hope then is in the companionship of the Law of righteousness [Dharma]. 'With the Law as his companion he crosses the darkness difficult to cross.')

that Rousseau took as a personal affront: 'Only the wicked man is alone.' Rousseau asserted in reply, anticipating Mark Twain,[1] that 'on the contrary only the good man is alone'. Now in a sense Rousseau is right. 'Most men are bad', as one of the seven sages of Greece remarked, and any one who sets out to follow a very strenuous virtue is likely to have few companions on the way. Rousseau is also right in a sense when he says that the wicked man needs to live in society so that he may have opportunity to practise his wickedness. Yet Rousseau fails to face the main issue: solitude is above all a psychic thing. A man may frequent his fellows and suffer none the less acutely, like Poe's 'Man of the Crowd', from a ghastly isolation. And conversely one may be like the ancient who said that he was never less alone than when he was alone.

Hawthorne, who was himself a victim of solitude, brooded a great deal on this whole problem, especially, as may be seen in the *Scarlet Letter* and elsewhere, on the isolating effects of sin. He perceived the relation of the problem to the whole trend of religious life in New England. The older Puritans had a sense of intimacy with God and craved no other companionship. With the weakening of their faith the later Puritans lost the sense of a divine companionship, but retained their aloofness from men. Hawthorne's own solution of the problem of solitude, so far as he offers any, is humanitarian. Quicken your sympathies. Let the man who has taken as his motto *Excelsior*[2] be

[1] 'Be good and you will be lonely.'

[2] In the poem by the Swiss poet C. Didier from which Longfellow's poem seems to be derived, the youth who

warned. Nothing will console him on the bleak heights either of knowledge or of power for the warm contact with the dwellers in the valley. Faust, who is a symbol of the solitude of knowledge, seeks to escape from his forlornness by recovering this warm contact. That the inordinate quest of power also leads to solitude is beyond question. Napoleon, the very type of the superman, must in the nature of the case have been very solitary.[1] His admirer Nietzsche wrote one day: 'I have forty-three years behind me and am as alone as if I were a child.' Carlyle, whose 'hero' derives like the superman from the original genius [2] of the eighteenth century, makes the following entry in his diary: 'My isolation, my feeling of loneliness, unlimitedness (much meant by this) what tongue shall say? Alone, alone!' [3]

It cannot be granted, however, that one may escape by love, as the Rousseauist understands the word, from the loneliness that arises from the un-

persists in scaling the heights in spite of all warnings is Byron!

Et Byron . . . disparaît aux yeux du pâtre épouvanté.

(See E. Estève, *Byron en France*, 147).

[1] In the *Mémoires d'Outre-Tombe* Chateaubriand quotes from the jottings of Napoleon on the island of Elba. 'Mon cœur se refuse aux joies communes comme à la doleur ordinaire.' He says of Napoleon elsewhere in the same work: 'Au fond il ne tenait à rien: homme solitaire, il se suffisait; le malheur ne fit que le rendre au désert de sa vie'.

[2] The solitude of the 'genius' is already marked in Blake:

O! why was I born with a different face?
Why was I not born like the rest of my race?
When I look, each one starts; when I speak, I offend;
Then I'm silent and passive and lose every friend.

[3] Froude's *Carlyle*, II. 377.

limited quest either of knowledge or power. For Rousseauistic love is also unlimited, whether one understands by love either passion or a diffusive sympathy for mankind at large. 'What solitudes are these human bodies,' Musset exclaimed when fresh from his affair with George Sand. Wordsworth cultivated a love for the lowly that quite overflowed the bounds of neo-classic selection. It is a well-known fact that the lowly did not altogether reciprocate. 'A desolate-minded man, ye kna,' said an old inn-keeper of the Lakes to Canon Rawnsley, ''T was potry as did it.' If Wordsworth writes so poignantly of solitude, one may infer that it is because he himself had experienced it.[1] Nor would it be difficult to show that the very philanthropic Ruskin was at least as solitary as Carlyle with his tirades against philanthropy.

I have spoken of the isolating effects of sin, but sin is scarcely the right word to apply to most of the romanticists. The solitude of which so many of them complain does, however, imply a good deal of spiritual inertia. Now to be spiritually inert, as I have said elsewhere, is to be temperamental, to indulge unduly the lust for knowledge or sensation or power without imposing on these lusts some

[1] No finer lines on solitude are found in English than those in which Wordsworth relates how from his room in Cambridge he could look out on

> The antechapel where the statue stood
> Of Newton with his prism and silent face,
> The marble index of a mind for ever
> Voyaging through strange seas of thought alone.
> (*Prelude* III. 61–3.)

Cf. also the line in the Sonnet on Milton:

> His soul was like a star and dwelt apart.

centre or principle of control set above the ordinary self. The man who wishes to fly off on the tangent of his own temperament and at the same time enjoy communion on any except the purely material level is harboring incompatible desires. For temperament is what separates. A sense of unlimitedness ('much meant by this' as Carlyle says) and of solitude are simply the penalties visited upon the eccentric individualist. If we are to unite on the higher levels with other men we must look in another direction than the expansive outward striving of temperament: we must in either the humanistic or religious sense undergo conversion. We must pull back our temperaments with reference to the model that we are imitating, just as, in Aristotle's phrase, one might pull back and straighten out a crooked stick.[1] Usually the brake on temperament is supplied by the ethos, the convention of one's age and country. I have tried to show elsewhere that the whole programme of the eccentric individualist is to get rid of this convention, whatever it may be, without developing some new principle of control. The eccentric individualist argues that to accept control, to defer to some centre as the classicist demands, is to cease to be himself. But are restrictions upon temperament so fatal to a man's being himself? The reply hinges upon the definition of the word self, inasmuch as man is a dual being. If a man is to escape from his isolation he must, I have said, aim at some goal set above his ordinary self which is at the same time his unique and separate self. But because this goal is set above his ordinary self, it is not therefore necessarily set

[1] *Eth. Nic.*, 1109 b.

above his total personality. The limitations that he imposes on his ordinary self may be the necessary condition of his entering into possession of his ethical self, the self that he possesses in common with other men. Aristotle says that if a man wishes to achieve happiness he must be a true lover of himself. It goes without saying that he means the ethical self. The author of a recent book on Ibsen says that Ibsen's message to the world is summed up in the line:

> This above all,—to thine own self be true.

It is abundantly plain from the context, however, that Polonius is a decayed Aristotelian and not a precursor of Ibsen. The self to which Aristotle would have a man be true is at the opposite pole from the self that Ibsen and the original geniuses are so eager to get uttered.

To impose the yoke of one's human self upon one's temperamental self is, in the Aristotelian sense, to work. Aristotle conceives of happiness in terms of work. All types of temperamentalists, on the other hand, are from the human point of view, passive. The happiness that they crave is a passive happiness. A man may pursue power with the energy of a Napoleon and yet remain ethically passive. He may absorb whole encyclopaedias and remain ethically passive. He may expand his sympathies until, like Schiller, he is ready to 'bestow a kiss upon the whole world' and yet remain ethically passive. A man ceases to be ethically passive only when he begins to work in the Aristotelian sense, that is when he begins to put the brake on temperament and impulse, and

in the same degree he tends to become ethically efficient. By his denial of the dualism of the spirit, Rousseau discredited this inner working, so that inwardness has come to seem synonymous with mere subjectivity; and to be subjective in the Rousseauistic sense is to be diffusive, to lack purpose and concentration, to lose one's self in a shoreless sea of revery.

The utilitarian intervenes at this point and urges the romanticist, since he has failed to work inwardly, at least to work outwardly. Having missed the happiness of ethical efficiency he may in this way find the happiness of material efficiency, and at the same time serve the world. This is the solution of the problem of happiness that Goethe offers at the end of the Second Faust, and we may affirm without hesitation that it is a sham solution. To work outwardly and in the utilitarian sense, without the inner working that can alone save from ethical anarchy, is to stimulate rather than repress the most urgent of all the lusts—the lust of power. It is only too plain that the unselective sympathy or joy in service with which Goethe would complete Faust's utilitarian activity is not in itself a sufficient counterpoise to the will to power, unless we assume with Rousseau that one may control expansive impulses by opposing them to one another.

A terrible danger thus lurks in the whole modern programme: it is a programme that makes for a formidable mechanical efficiency and so tends to bring into an ever closer material contact men who remain ethically centrifugal. The reason why the humanitarian and other schemes of communion

that have been set up during the last century have failed is that they do not, like the traditional schemes, set any bounds to mere expansiveness, or, if one prefers, they do not involve any conversion. And so it is not surprising that the feeling of emptiness [1] or unlimitedness and isolation should be the special mark of the melancholy of this period. René complains of his 'moral solitude'; [2] but, strictly speaking; his solitude is the reverse of moral. Only by cultivating his human self, and by the unceasing effort that this cultivation involves, does a man escape from his nightmare of separateness and so move in some measure towards happiness. But the happiness of which René dreams is unethical—something very private and personal and egoistic. Nothing is easier than to draw the line from René to Baudelaire and later decadents —for instance to Des Esseintes, the hero of Huysmans's novel 'A Rebours',[3] who is typical of the last exaggerations of the movement. Des Esseintes cuts himself off as completely as possible from other men and in the artificial paradise he has devised gives himself up to the quest of strange

[1] James Thomson in *The City of Dreadful Night* says that he would have entered hell

gratified to gain
That positive eternity of pain
Instead of this insufferable inane.

[2] R. Canat has taken this phrase as the title of his treatment of the subject: *La Solitude morale dans le mouvement romantique*.

[3] Decadent Rome had the equivalent of Des Esseintes. Seneca (*To Lucilius*, CXXII) speaks of those who seek to affirm their originality and attract attention to themselves by doing everything differently from other people and, 'ut ita dicam, *retro vivunt*'.

and violent sensation; but his dream of happiness along egoistic lines turns into a nightmare,[1] his palace of art becomes a hell. Lemaître is quite justified in saying of Des Esseintes that he is only René or Werther brought up to date—'a played-out and broken-down Werther who has a malady of the nerves, a deranged stomach and eighty years more of literature to the bad'.[2]

Emotional romanticism was headed from the start towards this bankruptcy because of its substitution for ethical effort of a mere lazy floating on the stream of mood and temperament. I have said that Buddhism saw in this ethical indolence the root of all evil. Christianity in its great days was preoccupied with the same problem. To make this point clear it will be necessary to add to what I have said about classical and romantic melancholy a few words about melancholy in the Middle Ages. In a celebrated chapter of his 'Genius of Christianity' (*Le Vague des passions*) Chateaubriand seeks to give to the malady of the age Christian and mediaeval origins. This was his pretext, indeed, for introducing René into an apology for Christianity and so, as Sainte-Beuve complained, administering poison in a sacred wafer. Chateaubriand begins by saying that the modern man is melancholy because, without having had experience himself, he is at the same time overwhelmed by the second-hand experience that has been heaped up in the books and other records of an advanced civilization; and so he suffers from

[1] Tennyson has traced this change of the aesthetic dream into a nightmare in his *Palace of Art*.

[2] *Contemporains*, I. 332.

a precocious disillusion; he has the sense of having exhausted life before he has enjoyed it. There is nothing specifically Christian in this disillusion and above all nothing mediaeval. But Chateaubriand goes on to say that from the decay of the pagan world and the barbarian invasions the human spirit received an impression of sadness and possibly a tinge of misanthropy which has never been completely effaced. Those that were thus wounded and estranged from their fellow men took refuge formerly in monasteries, but now that this resource has failed them, they are left in the world without being of it, and so they 'become the prey of a thousand chimeras'. Then is seen the rise of that guilty melancholy which the passions engender when, left without definite object, they prey upon themselves in a solitary heart.[1]

The *vague des passions*, the expansion of infinite indeterminate desire, that Chateaubriand here describes may very well be related to certain sides of Christianity—especially to what may be termed its neo-Platonic side. Yet Christianity at its best has shown itself a genuine religion; in other words, it has dealt sternly and veraciously with the facts of human nature. It has perceived clearly how a man may move towards happiness and how on the other hand he tends to sink into despair; or what amounts to the same thing, it has seen the supreme importance of spiritual effort and the supreme danger of spiritual sloth. The man who looked on himself as cut off from God and so ceased to strive was, according to the mediaeval Christian, the victim of *acedia*. This sluggishness and slackness of spirit, this mere

[1] *Génie du Christianisme*, Pt. II, Livre III, ch. IX.

drifting and abdication of will, may, as Chaucer's parson suggests, be the crime against the Holy Ghost itself. It would in fact not be hard to show that what was taken by the Rousseauist to be the badge of spiritual distinction was held by the mediaeval Christian to be the chief of all the deadly sins.

The victim of *acedia* often looked upon himself, like the victim of the malady of the age, as foredoomed. But though the idea of fate enters at times into mediæval melancholy, the man of the Middle Ages could scarcely so detach himself from the community as to suffer from that sense of loneliness which is the main symptom of romantic melancholy. This forlornness was due not merely to the abrupt disappearance of the older forms of communion, but to the failure of the new attempts at communion. When one gets beneath the surface of the nineteenth century one finds that it was above all a period of violent disillusions, and it is especially after violent disillusion that a man feels himself solitary and forlorn. I have said that the special mark of the half-educated man is his harboring of incompatible desires. The new religions or unifications of life that appeared during the nineteenth century made an especially strong appeal to the half-educated man because it seemed to him that by accepting some one of these he could enjoy the benefits of communion and at the same time not have to take on the yoke of any serious discipline; that he could, in the language of religion, achieve salvation without conversion. When a communion on these lines turns out to be not a reality, but a sham, and its disillusioned votary

feels solitary and forlorn, he is ready to blame everybody and everything except himself.

A few specific illustrations will help us to understand how romantic solitude, which was created by the weakening of the traditional communions, was enhanced by the collapse of various sham communions. Let us return for a moment to that eminent example of romantic melancholy and disillusion, Alfred de Vigny. His 'Chatterton' deals with the fatal misunderstanding of the original genius by other men. 'Moïse' deals more specifically with the problem of his solitude. The genius is so eminent and unique, says Vigny, speaking for himself from behind the mask of the Hebrew prophet, that he is quite cut off from ordinary folk who feel that they have nothing in common with him.[1] This forlornness of the genius is not the sign of some capital error in his philosophy. On the contrary it is the sign of his divine election, and so Moses blames God for his failure to find happiness.[2] If the genius is cut off from communion with men he cannot hope for companionship with God because he has grown too sceptical. Heaven is empty and in any case dumb; and so in the poem to which I have already referred (*Le Mont des Oliviers*) Vigny assumes the mask of Jesus himself to express this desolateness, and concludes that the

[1] L'orage est dans ma voix, l'éclair est sur ma bouche;
Aussi, loin de m'aimer, voilà qu'ils tremblent tous,
Et quand j'ouvre les bras, on tombe à mes genoux.

[2] Que vous ai-je donc fait pour être votre élu ?
. . . . . .
Hélas! je suis, Seigneur, puissant et solitaire,
Laissez-moi m'endormir du sommeil de la terre!

just man will oppose a haughty and Stoic disdain to the divine silence.[1]

All that is left for the genius is to retire into his ivory tower—a phrase appropriately applied for the first time to Vigny.[2] In the ivory tower he can at least commune with nature and the ideal woman. But Vigny came at a time when the Arcadian glamour was being dissipated from nature. Partly under scientific influence, she was coming to seem not a benign but a cold and impassive power, a collection of cruel and inexorable laws. I have already mentioned this mood that might be further illustrated from Taine and so many others towards the middle of the nineteenth century.[3] 'I am called a "mother",' Vigny makes Nature say, 'and I am a tomb'[4] ('La Maison du Berger'); and so in the *Maison roulante*, or sort of Arcadia on wheels that he has imagined, he must seek his chief solace with the ideal feminine companion. But woman herself turns out to be treacherous; and, assuming the mask of Samson ('La Colère de Samson'), Vigny utters a solemn malediction upon the eternal Delilah (*Et, plus ou moins, la Femme est toujours*

[1] Le juste opposera le dédain à l'absence
Et ne répondra plus que par un froid silence
Au silence éternel de la Divinité.

[2] See Sainte-Beuve's poetical epistle *À M. Villemain* (*Pensées d'Août*, 1837).

[3] See *Masters of Modern French Criticism*, 233, 238.

[4] Wordsworth writes

A piteous lot it were to flee from man
Yet not rejoice in Nature
(*Excursion*, IV. 514.)

This lot was Vigny's:

Ne me laisse jamais seul avec la Nature
Car je la connais trop pour n'en avoir pas peur.

Dalila). Such is the disillusion that comes from having sought an ideal communion in a liaison with a Parisian actress.[1]

Now that every form of communion has failed, all that is left it would seem is to die in silence and solitude like the wolf ('La Mort du Loup'). Vigny continues to hold, however, like the author of the 'City of Dreadful Night', that though men may not meet in their joys, they may commune after a fashion in their woe. He opposes to heartless nature and her 'vain splendor' the religion of pity, 'the majesty of human sufferings'.[2] Towards the end, when Vigny feels the growing prestige of science, he holds out the hope that a man may to a certain extent escape from the solitude of his own ego into some larger whole by contributing his mite to 'progress'. But the symbol of this communion [3] that he has chosen—that of the shipwrecked and sinking mariner who consigns his geographical discoveries to a bottle in the hope that it may be washed up on some civilized shore—is itself of a singular forlornness.

Vigny has a concentration and power of philosophical reflection that is rare among the romanticists. George Sand is inferior to him in this respect, but she had a richer and more generous nature, and is perhaps even more instructive in her life and writings for the student of romantic melancholy. After the loss of the religious faith of her childhood

[1] Madame Dorval.

[2] *La Maison du Berger*. Note that in Wordsworth the 'still sad music of humanity' is very closely associated with nature.

[3] *La Bouteille à la Mer*.

she became an avowed Rousseauist. She attacks a society that seems to her to stand in the way of the happiness of which she dreams—the supreme emotional intensity to be achieved in an ideal love. In celebrating passion and the rights of passion she is lyrical in the two main modes of the Rousseauist—she is either tender and elegiac, or else stormy and Titanic. But when she attempts to practice with Musset this religion of love, the result is violent disillusion. In the forlornness that follows upon the collapse of her sham communion she meditates suicide. 'Ten years ago', she wrote in 1845 to Mazzini, 'I was in Switzerland; I was still in the age of tempests; I made up my mind even then to meet you, if I should resist the temptation to suicide which pursued me upon the glaciers.' And then gradually a new faith dawned upon her; she substituted for the religion of love the religion of human brotherhood. She set up as an object of worship humanity in its future progress; and then, like so many other dreamers, she suffered a violent disillusion in the Revolution of 1848. The radiant abstraction she had been worshipping had been put to the test and she discovered that there entered into the actual make-up of the humanity she had so idealized 'a large number of knaves, a very large number of lunatics, and an immense number of fools'. What is noteworthy in George Sand is that she not only saved the precious principle of faith from these repeated shipwrecks, but towards the end of her life began to put it on a firmer footing. Like Goethe, she worked out to some extent, in opposition to romanticism, a genuinely ethical point of view.

This latter development can best be studied in her correspondence with Flaubert. She urges him to exercise his will, and he replies that he is as 'fatalistic as a Turk'. His fatalism, however, was not oriental but scientific or pseudo-scientific. I have already cited his demand that man be studied 'objectively', just as one would study 'a mastodon or a crocodile'. Flaubert refused to see any connection between this determinism and his own gloom, or between George Sand's assertion of will and her cheerfulness. It was simply, he held, a matter of temperament, and there is no doubt some truth in this contention. 'You at the first leap mount to heaven,' he says, 'while I, poor devil, am glued to the earth as though by leaden soles.' And again: 'In spite of your great sphinx eyes you have always seen the world as through a golden mist,' whereas 'I am constantly dissecting; and when I have finally discovered the corruption in anything that is supposed to be pure, the gangrene in its fairest parts, then I raise my head and laugh.' Yet George Sand's cheerfulness is also related to her perception of a power in man to work upon himself—a power that sets him apart from other animals. To enter into this region of ethical effort is to escape from the whole fatal circle of naturalism, and at the same time to show some capacity to mature—a rare achievement among the romanticists. The contrast is striking here between George Sand and Hugo, who, as the ripe fruit of his meditations, yields nothing better than the apotheosis of Robespierre and Marat. 'I wish to see man as he is,' she writes to Flaubert. 'He is not good or bad: he is good and bad. But he is something else

besides: being good and bad he has an inner force which leads him to be very bad and a little good, or very good and a little bad. I have often wondered', she adds, 'why your "Education Sentimentale" was so ill received by the public, and the reason, as it seems to me, is that its characters are passive—that they do not act upon themselves.' But the Titaness of the period of 'Lélia' can scarcely be said to have acted upon herself, so that she is justified in writing: 'I cannot forget that my personal victory over despair is the work of my will, and of a new way of understanding life, which is the exact opposite of the one I held formerly.' How different is the weary cry of Flaubert: 'I am like a piece of clock-work, what I am doing to-day I shall be doing to-morrow; I did exactly the same thing yesterday; I was exactly the same man ten years ago.'

The correspondence of Flaubert and George Sand bears interestingly on another of the sham religions of the nineteenth century—the religion of art. Art is for Flaubert not merely a religion but a fanaticism. He preaches abstinence, renunciation and mortification of the flesh in the name of art. He excommunicates those who depart from artistic orthodoxy and speaks of heretics and disbelievers in art with a ferocity worthy of a Spanish inquisitor. Ethical beauty such as one finds in the Greeks at their best resides in order and proportion; it is not a thing apart, but the outcome of some harmonious whole. Beauty in the purely aesthetic and unethical sense that Flaubert gives to the word is little more than the pursuit of illusion. The man who thus treats beauty as a thing apart, who does

not refer back his quest of the exquisite to some ethical centre, will spend his life Ixion-like embracing phantoms. 'O Art, Art,' exclaims Flaubert, 'bitter deception, nameless phantom, which gleams and lures us to our ruin!' He speaks elsewhere of 'the chimera of style which is wearing him out soul and body'. Attaching as he did an almost religious importance to his quest of the exquisite, he became, like so many other Rousseauists, not merely aesthetic but hyperaesthetic. He complains in his old age: 'My sensibility is sharper than a razor's edge; the creaking of a door, the face of a bourgeois, an absurd statement set my heart to throbbing and completely upset me.' Hardly anywhere else, indeed, will one find such accents of bitterness, such melancholy, welling up unbidden from the very depths of the heart, as in the devotees of art for art's sake—Flaubert, Leconte de Lisle, Théophile Gautier.

George Sand takes Flaubert to task with admirable tact for his failure to subordinate art to something higher than itself. 'Talent imposes duties; and art for art's sake is an empty word.' As she grew older she says she came more and more to put truth above beauty, and goodness before strength. 'I have reflected a great deal on what is *true*, and in this search for truth, the sentiment of my ego has gradually disappeared.' The truth on which she had reflected was what she herself calls total truth (*le vrai total*), not merely truth according to the natural law, which received such exclusive emphasis towards the middle of the nineteenth century as to lead to the rise of another sham religion—the religion of science. 'You have

a better sense for total truth', she tells one of her correspondents, 'than Sainte-Beuve, Renan and Littré. They have fallen into the German rut: therein lies their weakness.' And Flaubert writes to George Sand: 'What amazes and delights me is the strength of your whole personality, not that of the brain alone.'

Furthermore the holding of the human law that made possible this rounded development, this growth towards total truth, was a matter not of tradition but of immediate perception. George Sand had succeeded, as Taine says, in making the difficult transition from an hereditary faith to a personal conviction. Now this perception of the human law is something very different from the pantheistic revery in which George Sand was also an adept. To look on revery as the equivalent of vision in the Aristotelian sense, as Rousseau and so many of his followers have done, is to fall into sham spirituality. Maurice de Guérin falls into sham spirituality when he exclaims 'Oh! this contact of nature and the soul would engender an ineffable voluptuousness, a prodigious love of heaven and of God.' I am not asserting that George Sand herself discriminated sharply between ethical and aesthetic perception, or that she is to be rated as a very great sage at any time. Yet she owes her recovery of serenity after suffering shock upon shock of disillusion to her having exercised in some degree what she terms 'the contemplative sense wherein resides invincible faith' (*le sens contemplatif où réside la foi invincible*), and the passages that bear witness to her use of this well-nigh obsolete sense are found in her correspondence.

Wordsworth lauds in true Rousseauistic fashion a 'wise passiveness'. But to be truly contemplative is not to be passive at all, but to be 'energetic' in Aristotle's sense, or strenuous in Buddha's sense. It is a matter of no small import that the master analyst of the East and the master analyst of the West are at one in their solution of the supreme problem of ethics—the problem of happiness. For there can be no doubt that the energy [1] in which the doctrine of Aristotle culminates is the same as the 'strenuousness' [2] on which Buddha puts his final emphasis. The highest good they both agree is a contemplative *working*. It is by thus working according to the human law that one rises above the naturalistic level. The scientific rationalists of the nineteenth century left no place for this true human spontaneity when they sought to subject man entirely to the 'law for thing'. This scientific determinism was responsible for a great deal of spiritual depression and *acedia*, especially in France during the second half of the nineteenth century.[3] But even if science is less dogmatic and absolute one needs to consider why it does not deserve to be given the supreme and central place in life, why it cannot, in short, take the place of humanism and religion, and the working according to the human law that they both enjoin.

[1] See Book IX of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

[2] 'All salutary conditions have their root in strenuousness' (appamāda), says Buddha.

[3] See *Masters of Modern French Criticism*, Essay on Taine, *passim*. Paul Bourget in his *Essais de Psychologie contemporaine* (2 vols.) has followed out during this period the survivals of the older romantic melancholy and their reinforcement by scientific determinism.

A man may indeed effect through science a certain escape from himself, and this is very salutary so far as it goes; he has to discipline himself to an order that is quite independent of his own fancies and emotions. He becomes objective, in short, but objective according to the natural and not according to the human law. Objectivity of this kind gives control over natural forces, but it does not supply the purpose for which these forces are to be used. It gives the airship, for instance, but does not determine whether the airship is to go on some beneficent errand or is to scatter bombs on women and children. Science does not even set right limits to the faculty that it chiefly exercises—the intellect. In itself it stimulates rather than curbs one of the three main lusts to which human nature is subject —the lust of knowledge. Renan, who makes a religion of science, speaks of 'sacred curiosity'. But this is even more dangerous than the opposite excess of the ascetic Christian who denounces all curiosity as vain. The man of science avers indeed that he does subordinate his knowledge to an adequate aim, namely the progress of humanity. But the humanity of the Baconian is only an intellectual abstraction, just as the humanity of the Rousseauist is only an emotional dream. George Sand found, as we have seen, that the passage from one's dream of humanity to humanity in the concrete involved a certain disillusion. The scientific or rationalistic humanitarian is subject to similar disillusions.[1] Science not only fails to set proper limits to the activity of the intellect, but one must

[1] 'Le pauvre M. Arago, revenant un jour de l'Hôtel de Ville en 1848 après une épouvantable émeute, disait triste-

also note a curious paradox in its relation to the second of the main lusts to which man is subject, the lust for emotion (*libido sentiendi*). The prime virtue of science is to be unemotional and at the same time keenly analytical. Now protracted and unemotional analysis finally creates a desire, as Renan says, for the opposite pole, 'the kisses of the naïve being', and in general for a frank surrender to the emotions. Science thus actually prepares clients for the Rousseauist.[1] The man of science is also flattered by the Rousseauistic notion that conscience and virtue are themselves only forms of emotion. He is thus saved from anything so distasteful as having to subordinate his own scientific discipline to some superior religious or humanistic discipline. He often oscillates between the rationalistic and the emotional pole, not only in other things, but also in his cult of humanity. But if conscience is merely an emotion there is a cult that makes a more potent appeal to conscience than the cult of humanity itself, and that is the cult of country. One is here at the root of the most dangerous of all the sham religions of the modern age—the religion of country, the frenzied nationalism that is now threatening to make an end of civilization itself.

Both emotional nationalism and emotional internationalism go back to Rousseau, but in his final emphasis he is an emotional nationalist; [2] and that

ment à l'un de ses aides de camp au ministère de la marine: "En vérité ces gens-là ne sont pas raisonnables".' Doudan, *Lettres*, IV. 338.

[1] See Preface (pp. viii–ix) to his *Souvenirs d'enfance et de jeunesse* and my comment in *The New Laokoon*, 207–8.

[2] Most of the political implications of the point of view

is because he saw that patriotic 'virtue' is a more potent intoxicant than the love of humanity. The demonstration came in the French Revolution, which began as a great international movement on emotional lines and ended in imperialism and Napoleon Bonaparte. It is here that the terrible peril of a science that is pursued as an end in itself becomes manifest. It disciplines man and makes him efficient on the naturalistic level, but leaves him ethically undisciplined. Now in the absence of ethical discipline the lust for knowledge and the lust for feeling count very little, at least practically, compared with the third main lust of human nature —the lust for power. Hence the emergence of that most sinister of all types, the efficient megalomaniac. The final use of a science that has thus become a tool of the lust for power is, in Burke's phrase, to 'improve the mystery of murder'.

This union of material efficiency and ethical unrestraint, though in a way the upshot of the whole movement we have been studying, is especially marked in the modern German. Goethe, as I have pointed out, is ready to pardon Faust for grave violations of the moral law because of work which, so far from being ethical, is, in view of the ruin in which it involves the rustic pair, Baucis and Philemon, under suspicion of being positively unethical. Yet Goethe was far from being a pure utilitarian and he had reacted more than most

I am developing I am reserving for a volume I have in preparation to be entitled *Democracy and Imperialism*. Some of my conclusions will be found in two articles in the (New York) *Nation:* 'The Breakdown of Internationalism' (June 17 and 24, 1915), and 'The Political Influence of Rousseau' (Jan. 18, 1917).

Germans of his time from Rousseauism. Rousseau is glorified by Germans as a chief source of their *Kultur*, as I have already pointed out. Now *Kultur* when analyzed breaks up into two very different things—scientific efficiency and emotionalism or what the Germans (and unfortunately not the Germans alone) term 'idealism'. There is no question about the relation of this idealism to the stream of tendency of which Rousseau is the chief representative. By his corruption of conscience Rousseau made it possible to identify character with temperament. It was easy for Fichte and others to take the next step and identify national character with national temperament. The Germans, according to Fichte, are all beautiful souls, the elect of nature. If they have no special word for character it is because to be a German and have character are synonymous. Character is something that gushes up from the primordial depths of the German's being without any conscious effort on his part.[1] The members of a whole national group may thus flatter one another and inbreed their national 'genius' in the romantic sense, and feel all the while that they are ecstatic 'idealists'; yet as a result of the failure to refer their genius back to some ethical centre, to work, in other words, according to the human law, they may, so far as the members of other national groups are concerned, remain in a state of moral solitude.

Everything thus hinges on the meaning of the word 'work'. In the abstract and metaphysical sense man can know nothing of unity. He may, however, by working in the human sense, by imposing, that

[1] *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, XII.

is, due limits on his expansive desires, close up in some measure the gap in his own nature (the 'civil war in the cave') and so tend to become inwardly one. He may hope in the same way to escape from the solitude of his own ego, for the inner unity that he achieves through work is only an entering into possession of his ethical self, the self that he possesses in common with other men. Thus to work ethically is not only to become more unified and happy but also to move away from what is less permanent towards what is more permanent and therefore more peaceful in his total nature; so that the problem of happiness and the problem of peace turn out at last to be inseparable.

Souls, says Emerson, never meet; and it is true that a man never quite escapes from his solitude. That does not make the choice of direction any the less important. An infinite beckons to him on either hand. The one inspires the divine discontent, the other romantic restlessness. If instead of following the romantic lure he heeds the call from the opposite direction, he will not indeed attain to any perfect communion but he will be less solitary. Strictly speaking, a man is never happy in the sense of being completely satisfied with the passing moment,[1] or never, Dr. Johnson would add, except when he is drunk. The happiness of the sober and waking man resides, it may be, not in his content with the present moment but in the

[1] I should perhaps allow for the happiness that may be experienced in moments of supernormal consciousness—something quite distinct from emotional or other intoxication. Fairly consistent testimony as to moments of this kind is found in the records of the past, from the early Buddhists down to Tennyson.

very effort that marks his passage from a lower to a higher ethical level.

The happiness of which Rousseau dreamed, it has been made plain, was not this active and ethical happiness, but rather the passive enjoyment of the beautiful moment—the moment that he would like to have last for ever. After seeking for the beautiful moment in the intoxication of love, he turned, as we have seen, to pantheistic revery. 'As long as it lasts,' he says of a moment of this kind, 'one is self-sufficing like God.' Yes, but it does not last, and when he wakes from his dream of communion with nature, he is still solitary, still the prisoner of his ego. The pantheistic dreamer is passive in every sense. He is not working either according to the human or according to the natural law, and so it is not gaining either in material or in ethical efficiency. In a world such as that in which we live this seems too much like picnicking on a battle-field. Rousseau could on occasion speak shrewdly on this point. He wrote to a youthful enthusiast who wished to come and live with him at Montmorency: 'The first bit of advice I should like to give you is not to indulge in the taste you say you have for the contemplative life and which is only an indolence of the spirit reprehensible at every age and especially at yours. Man is not made to meditate but to act.'

The contemplative life is, then, according to Rousseau, the opposite of action. But to contemplate is, according to an Aristotle or a Buddha, to engage in the most important form of action, the form that leads to happiness. To identify leisure and the contemplative life with pantheistic revery

as Rousseau does, is to fall into one of the most vicious of confusions. Perhaps indeed the most important contrast one can reach in a subject of this kind is that between a wise strenuousness and a more or less wise passiveness, between the spiritual athlete and the cosmic loafer, between a Saint Paul, let us say, and a Walt Whitman.

The spiritual idling and drifting of the Rousseauist would be less sinister if it did not coexist in the world of to-day with an intense material activity. The man who seeks happiness by work according to the natural law is to be rated higher than the man who seeks happiness in some form of emotional intoxication (including pantheistic revery). He is not left unarmed, a helpless dreamer in the battle of life. The type of efficiency he is acquiring also helps him to keep at bay man's great enemy, ennui. An Edison, we may suppose, who is drawn ever onward by the lure of wonder and curiosity and power, has little time to be bored. It is surely better to escape from the boredom of life after the fashion of Edison than after the fashion of Baudelaire.[1]

I have already pointed out, however, the peril in a one-sided working of this kind. It makes man efficient without making him ethical. It stimulates rather than corrects a fearless, formless expansion on the human level. This inordinate reaching out beyond bounds is, as the great Greek poets saw

[1] I scarcely need to say that I am speaking of the man of science only in so far as he is purely naturalistic in his point of view. There may enter into the total personality of Edison or any particular man of science other and very different elements.

with such clearness, an invitation to Nemesis. The misery that results from unrestraint, from failure to work according to the human law, is something different from mere pain and far more to be dreaded; just as the happiness that results from a right working according to the human law is something different from mere pleasure and far more worthy of pursuit.

The present alliance between emotional romanticists and utilitarians [1] is a veritable menace to civilization itself. It does not follow, as I said in a previous chapter, because revery or 'intuition of the creative flux' cannot take the place of leisure or meditation, that one must therefore condemn it utterly. It may, like other forms of romanticism, have a place on the recreative side of life. What finally counts is work according to either the human or the natural law, but man cannot always be working. He needs moments of relief from tension and concentration and even, it should seem, of semi-oblivion of his conscious self. As one of the ways of winning such moments of relaxation and partial forgetfulness much may be said for revery. In general one must grant the solace and rich source of poetry that is found in communion with nature even though the final emphasis be put on communion with man. It is no small thing to be, as Arnold says Wordsworth was, a 'priest of the wonder and bloom of the world'. One cannot, however, grant

[1] M. René Berthelot has written a book on pragmatism and similar tendencies in contemporary philosophy entitled *Un Romantisme utilitaire*. I have not read it, but the title alone is worth more than most books on the subject I hav read.

the Wordsworthian that to be a priest of wonder in necessarily to be also a priest of wisdom. Thus to promote to the supreme and central place something that is legitimate in its own degree, but secondary, is to risk starting a sham religion.

Those who have sought to set up a cult of love or beauty or science or humanity or country are open to the same objections as the votaries of nature. However important each of these things may be in its own place, it cannot properly be put in the supreme and central place for the simple reason that it does not involve any adequate conversion or discipline of man's ordinary self to some ethical centre. I have tried to show that the sense of solitude or forlornness that is so striking a feature of romantic melancholy arises not only from a loss of hold on the traditional centres, but also from the failure of these new attempts at communion to keep their promises. The number of discomfitures of this kind in the period that has elapsed since the late eighteenth century, suggests that this period was even more than most periods an age of sophistry. Every age has had its false teachers, but possibly no age ever had so many dubious moralists as this, an incomparable series of false prophets, from Rousseau himself down to Nietzsche and Tolstoy.

PAUL ELMER MORE

1864–

VICTORIAN LITERATURE: THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHANGE[1] (1910)

To write a history of English literature from 1837 to 1901, in all its ramifications from political economy to fiction, is a task to make any but the stoutest heart quail, and, whatever else may be said of Professor Walker's volume, it bears evidence of industrious reading and patient understanding.[2] Like most works of its kind it suffers somewhat from uncertainty of aim, being neither quite encyclopaedic in completeness of detail nor sufficiently arbitrary in selection to deal effectively with ideas. But its arrangement by subjects and its inclusion of so much that is commonly rejected from literary history offer this great compensation that we are enabled to see the interworking of the various intellectual currents: Darwin and Tennyson, Malthus and Matthew Arnold, Spencer and Newman, thus appear as fellow labourers, moulding and expressing that subtle, evasive thing we call the spirit of the age. Evasive in a way that spirit is, as the inner forces of life must always be, yet there is one date and one book so pre-eminent that no one can

[1] Reprinted from *Shelburne Essays, Seventh Series*, by permission of, and by arrangement with, Houghton Mifflin Co.

[2] *The Literature of the Victorian Era.* By Hugh Walker. Cambridge University Press. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1910.

go astray in seeking the centre of the manifold activities of Victorian thought. At the close of the reign—Professor Walker recalls the incident that every one will remember—a London daily paper asked its readers to send in lists of the ten books, English or foreign, which in their judgment were the greatest and most influential of the century past. The lists varied widely, save in one respect: in every list stood Darwin's publication of 1859, *The Origin of Species*.

One is not inclined to take these plebiscites very seriously, yet this was really an extraordinary event. I doubt if such an agreement on the pre-eminence of a contemporary book would have been possible in any country in any other age of the world; nor is the nature of the selection less remarkable than its unanimity. Probably not half the persons who named *The Origin of Species* had ever seriously read it, yet they all felt in some vague way that this book had struck the keynote of the century; their concurrence showed a certain lack of individual intelligence, but it was unmistakably significant. In Darwin's hypothesis, though they may not have comprehended its full bearing, they thought the mind of man had found at last that for which it had long been seeking—the perfect scientific formula: it looked to them as if a new and everlasting basis for truth had been laid. Descartes had reduced the physical world to a mechanical system, and Newton had formulated its mathematical laws. But Descartes had, theoretically at least, separated the sphere of the human spirit from his system, and to bring the living world, exclusive of man, within its control he had,

by a gross violation of facts, denied to animals all reason and emotion and treated them as mere machines; while Newton in his laws merely ignored the whole organic creation. This extra-scientific field Darwin finally reclaimed. Evolution, indeed, was an old hypothesis, and long before Darwin's day had been brought into considerable prominence; but in the earlier romantic philosophers of France and Germany it had not been fortified by the patient unemotional accumulation of observed facts, and in the theory of Lamarck, the greatest of the scientific ante-Darwinians, it had not purged itself of various complications with some incalculable principle guiding the development of organic nature to a definite end. By the elimination of teleological and other foreign elements, and by the authority of his vast patience, Darwin raised evolution to the side of gravitation. As an equivalent of the mechanical law of motion in the inanimate world he gave precise expression to the absolute law of change in the animate, thus uniting inorganic and organic (including all that is man) in one universal scheme of science. The new law left no place for a power existing outside of nature and controlling the world as a lower order of existence, nor did it recognise a higher and a lower principle within nature itself, but in the mere blind force of variation, in the very unruliness to design or government, found the source of order and development. Chance itself was thus rendered calculable, and science reigned supreme through 'all this changing world of changeless law'. No wonder that men were a little dazed by the marvellous simplicity and finality of this formula, and were

ready to exclaim, with a new meaning to the words:

> Let the great world spin for ever down the ringing grooves of change.

But like all other monistic theories of the reason, whether in science or metaphysics, Darwinism soon discovered within itself a principle of disintegration, and the ancient truth was again vindicated that any logical explanation of the world when carried to its conclusion is illogical. Fitness, in the new creed of evolutionary survival, meant adaptability to environment, but environment itself was produced by fitness, and the theory was thus seen to be revolving in a vicious circle. Fitness, which was to explain the mystery of order and apparent design, becomes, unless it is made relative to something outside of the things fit, a perfectly empty word, and the whole system falls to the ground. Against so illogical a theory Paley's simple argument for design in creation from the analogy of the watch is entirely valid. That syllogism may not prove the existence of a personal God, as Paley desired, or confirm the Thirty-nine Articles, but it does expose the inadequacy of holding that we can explain the origin of an orderly system of nature through any such hypothesis as the Darwinian law of flux and probability. Like other cosmical theories, it may have little affirmative value, but it is strong to devour its rivals. As a matter of fact the insufficiency of Darwinism in its purest form has been pretty widely acknowledged by men of science themselves. In the recent celebration of Darwin's centennial two things were

remarkable: the great reverence accorded to the memory of the man, and the fact that his successors are making desperate, and so far unaccepted, efforts to supplement or supplant the law of survival as the driving force of evolution. An unscientific skeptic might hint—his words will do no harm—that there is something paradoxical in this extreme reverence for Darwin undisturbed by this discontent with his chief hypothesis. The admiration is not due to the character of the man alone, for others have devoted their lives nobly and unreservedly to the search for scientific truth; it is rather the recognition of the fact that he at last was able to impose for a while on the world an hypothesis of life which was purely 'causo-mechanical', and which eliminated everything divine and incalculable above or within nature. The discontent is a forced avowal that no such hypothesis is tenable. The additions to the Darwinian theory or the substitutes for it—and they are to-day almost as numerous as the great centres of biological study—are with one or two exceptions steps away from the sufficiency of the mere law of change which was to correspond to the law of motion in the inorganic sphere; some of the substitutes are, in fact, not far from the submission to teleological principles which are frankly beyond the scope of scientific formulation.

All this may seem rather remote from Victorian literature, but in fact it is, as the anecdote related by Professor Walker indicates, the very heart of the matter. Science has been, admittedly, the dominating intellectual force of the age, and the point of contact of science with literature is just

this law of change. For it must not be forgotten that law, as it is understood in science, is a formulation of motion in the organic and of change in the inorganic realms as a power sufficient without any added principle of control to work out the ends of creation as we see them amplified in orderly recurrence and progress. Science and romanticism sprang up together and have grown side by side. In one repect they have embraced diverse, even hostile, temperaments—on this side the man who deals with facts and tends to a hard materialism or a dry intellectualism, on the other the man of sentiment who dreams and loses himself in futile revery. Yet it is a notorious, if paradoxical, fact that the effect of science on art and literature has been to reinforce a romantic impressionism, and that the man of scientific training when he turns to the humanities is almost always an impressionist. The reason is plain: he simply carries into art the law of change with which he has dealt in his proper sphere, and acknowledges no principle of taste superior to the shifting pleasure of the individual. In this he is typical of the age, for if the particular causo-mechanical theory of evolution promulgated by Darwin has proved untenable, evolution itself has remained as almost, if not quite, the universal creed of those who believe that some such hypothesis will ultimately be found adequate to explain all the processes of life. Men of science are only servants of the law of change in their special field of material observation, and it is easy to trace the working of the same belief in other regions of contemporary thought, most easy no doubt in philosophy which is nothing more than the effort of the reason to

interpret in its own terms the common impulse and ambition of a period. There is a respectable school of idealists who hold to a theory of absolute unity and stability in which all the diversity and motion of the world are in some transcendental way absorbed. But these are not the regnant and effective teachers; they are, so to speak, the beautiful relics of a past creed. Pragmatism is the slogan of the hour, and there is a kind of truth in the remark thrown out recently in an English review that William James was the most influential leader in the spiritual life of the present generation. Now Pragmatism is just the culmination of what may be called the central philosophizing of the past century. It has assumed various forms and has often been denied by its followers, but its general tendency is plain: it is at once romantic and scientific, an adventurous revolt against the dogmatic intellectualism in which science has involved itself and at the same time thoroughly evolutionary, even Darwinian, in theory. In the words of Professor Dewey:[1] 'When he [Darwin] said of species what Galileo had said of the earth, *e pur si muove*, he emancipated, once for all, genetic and experimental ideas as an organon of asking questions and looking for explanations.' As a result we have the metaphysical conception 'of a wide open universe, a universe without bounds in time or space, without final limits of origin or destiny'—in short, to use the elegant pragmatic diction borrowed from the police courts, 'a universe with the lid off'. 'No,'

[1] *The Influence of Darwin on Philosophy, and Other Essays in Contemporary Thought.* By John Dewey. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1910.

continues our philosophical guide, 'Nature is not an unchangeable order, unwinding itself majestically from the reel of law under the control of deified forces. It is *an indefinite congeries of changes*. Laws are not governmental regulations which limit change, but are convenient formulations of selected portions of change followed through a longer or shorter period of time, and then registered in statistical forms that are amenable to mathematical manipulation.'

I am not here attempting to controvert Pragmatism, though it may be worth while to hint in passing that the supercilious tone of its votaries is utterly unjustifiable until the causo-mechanical theory of evolution on which it is based has found some commonly accepted formulation among biologists, and to repeat what I have said elsewhere, that it is just as much a one-sided rationalization of the data of experience as the contrary theory of idealism which Professor Dewey brushes aside contemptuously as 'intellectual atavism'. To the self-sufficiency of the pragmatist and idealist alike there is one reply: 'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'

Of the other manifestations of the law of change, I may speak even more briefly. In religion it is exhibited in the extraordinary influence of Cardinal Newman upon Brunetière and other French modernists who see, or think they see, in his 'theory of development of doctrine' a means of reconciling Christian dogma with the scientific spirit of the age. The Catholic theory of development as expounded by Newman meant the slow grasping by

human intelligence of great ideas which were nevertheless 'communicated to the world once for all by inspired teachers'; it is a perception of change playing about a fixed basis of unchangeable truth, with a growing tendency to lay weight in this dualism upon the element of change. The so-called 'new theology' of Protestantism is more thoroughgoing and, virtually dispensing with the relation of mankind to an immutable deity, discovers all of religion that is necessary in the varying sympathy of man with his fellow man unregulated by any divine command or revelation.

Economics in its acceptance of the temper of the times has undergone a strange but perfectly logical reversal. Synchronously with the growth of the evolutionary theory arose the economic doctrine of *laissez-faire*, culminating in the Manchester school, which held that a world of economic order would develop mechanically from the free play of individuals upon one another without the intervention of any governmental and, so to speak, external regulation of competition. It was the perfect counterpart to the Darwinian notion of the survival of the fittest amidst the accidental and competitive variation of individuals.[1] Such a theory was pragmatic with a vengeance, and brought its

[1] In theory, and in the practice of some individuals, the Manchester school of economics was mixed up with various philanthropic schemes. Throughout the century there is to be noted a fluctuation between the harshest egotism and the most sentimental sympathy; the two moods springing indeed from the same surrender to the philosophy of change and easily passing into each other. The compensation is doubtful, and as a matter of fact egotism will always under the stress of circumstances take the upper hand, unless con-

pragmatic penalty of social disease and rebellion. In its place has arisen the socialistic creed, which for the struggle of individuals sets up the warfare of classes and a foreordained democracy, and which bears roughly to the Manchester school the same relation that some of the aspects of 'orthogenesis' bear to Darwinism. It is withal as convincedly evolutionary as was its predecessor,—however much it may threaten revolution in practice,—and as impatient of any law of control outside of material forces, only these forces have assumed a social instead of an individualistic form. Both self-developing individualism and self-developing socialism are the children of the law of change, and the admixture of humanitarian sympathy in both is really only another aspect of the same principle.

The theory of education has naturally gone along with these economic and philosophic innovations. Thus, the elective system in its present form is plainly a late-born offspring of the individualistic doctrine of *laissez-faire*. The whole shift of emphasis from the classics and humanities to scientific or quasi-scientific studies is a revulsion from the old notion that the experience of life in its essential phases is permanent and has once for all been expressed, to the conception of man as completely immersed in the *indefinite congeries of changes* which we call nature. We sometimes blame the teachers of Latin and Greek for certain disquieting

trolled by some principle more foreign to itself than sympathy. As regards the relation of evolution to economics, it is well known that both Darwin and Wallace were led to the survival theory by the reading of Malthus.

weaknesses that have shown themselves in the recent results of education; as a matter of fact their only fault has been the lack of sufficient insight and strength to stem the tide of custom; by endeavouring to bring classical instruction into conformity with the spirit of the age they have largely forfeited its distinct virtue and have so far rendered it superfluous. If Greek affords no discipline corrective of the influence of science and different from that of the languages in which modern tendencies are expressed, the study of it is merely an enormous waste of time.

These things are the commonplaces of criticism and will scarcely be disputed. I have thought it worth while to bring them together in these brief statements, because in this way we get a clearer perception of the principle that has been everywhere and busily at work in the imaginative product of the nineteenth century and of our own day. Poetically the sources of Victorian literature go back to Wordsworth, who is emotionally the father of us all. No doubt the originating power of Wordsworth has in one sense been exaggerated, or at least misunderstood, for his return to nature is no new thing but a logical outgrowth of the philosophy of Rousseau and beyond him of the natural religion of the English deists. Yet there is withal a difference between the deistic and the romantic spirit towards nature as profound as it is hard to define. Almost the precise Wordsworthian note may be heard now and then in the poets and philosophers of the early eighteenth century, but in general one feels that their absorption of humanity in nature was by a conscious and clear process of elimination.

The higher part of man, all that we associate with the mystic and indefinable, was plainly omitted from the deistic union of the human and the natural, and there was consequently no confusion in their ideas. You may walk in the meadow land of their new world with a feeling of ease and comfort, unperturbed by the intrusion of alien and higher cravings, but rather with the assurance that at will, if the moment of dissatisfaction comes, you may lift your eyes away from its homogeneous beauty to an utterly different region. In Wordsworth's sphere, on the contrary, you are caught as it were in a web of illusion, from which there is no escape save by a violent rupture. When his fervid soul, dismayed by the outcome of the Revolution, turned for solace to the quiet of the fields and the sublimity of the hills, he carried into that communion all the enthusiasm which an earlier age had reserved for the religion of the supernatural, and which the deists in their satisfaction with natural religion had deliberately and completely shut out from their consciousness. In thus obliterating the distinctions of the reason, Wordsworth introduced into the worship of nature the great pathetic fallacy which was to bewilder the minds and hearts of poets for an indefinite period.

And inevitably as science, becoming aware of the sway of change in nature, tried to formulate this power in terms of a causo-mechanical law, so poetry attempted to give it expression in human emotion. If any one thing is learned from such a survey of the poets of the past age and of to-day as we get in Professor Walker's volume, it is the constant immanence of this philosophy of change,

manifesting itself in both the form and the substance of our verse. Walt Whitman is taken by many to be the most significant poet of America, not on account of his mere democracy, but because his democracy was part and parcel of his proclamation of the philosophy of change and motion. The universe to his eye was a strange motley procession of shifting forms, at which he gazed undismayed, calling upon no passing appearance to stay for an instant and deliver its meaning. To William Morris also the world was a swift-moving succession of forms, glinting now with iridescent colours and breathing entranced melodies, with always the haunting fear in the observer's mind that if for one moment they should pause in their headlong flight they would vanish irrevocably into the void: life is many-hued, intricate motion; rest is death. And the evocation of Swinburne was essentially the same unintermittent flux of phenomena, though with him it took the special form of dissolving the earth into endless impressions of blowing wind and billowing water, with no solid ground beneath the feet. In Browning the new philosophy took the disguise of a buoyant revelling in the mere conflict and tumult of life without any formal restraint upon its multiform activity. His joyous acceptance of the world and his optimistic assurance that all things will of themselves work out right have passed with many for spiritual insight, whereas in reality his appeal to the present is due to his blind courage in waiving the critical check of the spirit of permanence. So one might go on enumerating the major poets of the age, but the repetition would only add tedium to the argument, and, indeed, I

have already touched on this point many times in my essays on individual writers.

There is of course another aspect of Victorian poetry which must not be ignored. As no age, even the most self-satisfied, is entirely itself, but carries with it the memory of all that has gone before, so these singers of the flux are troubled at times by echoes of a past experience. Now and again a line, a note, will slip in that recalls the old desire of changeless rest and of the consummation of peace. It might even be more exact to say that the poets of the century as a whole do not so much give utterance to the unhesitating acceptance of the official philosophy as they express its ever-growing predominance. And thus the most characteristic voices among the Victorians were just the two, Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, who felt most poignantly and sang most clearly, though in diverse ways, the transition from the old to the new. In Tennyson the two fields lay curiously side by side, and it is the sign of a certain lack of hardness in his mental fibre that he never seemed to perceive their mutual antagonism. At one moment he is the conscious laureate of science and evolution and of a self-evolving change moving to some far-off divine event; at another he is the prophet of insight, singing the mystery of the timeless, changeless spirit. Matthew Arnold's intelligence was too well-knit to suffer any such disruption of its powers. With him the error was deeper, yet more logical. Emotionally he was about equally susceptible to the prevailing currents of his day and of the past, and their intimate fusion produced a strange uneasiness of mind and heart, leaving him at home neither in

this world nor in the other. He looked abroad and saw nothing but change, and it seemed to him as if the permanent things that his soul craved were themselves in a state of transition. So it was he made his famous complaint, which is in a way the confession of his generation, at the Grande Chartreuse:

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
> The other powerless to be born,
> With nowhere yet to rest my head,
> Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.

But if this confusion in Matthew Arnold, or parallelism in Tennyson, of the past and the present is characteristic of Victorian poetry, the victory in the end is coming overwhelmingly to the new philosophy. If any one writer represents the thought of those who are most deeply immersed in the spirit of the passing day, it is George Meredith, and there is no poet or prose-writer in English who more speaks and exalts the belief in humanity as completely involved in the process of natural growth. This I suspect, rather than any perversity of wit, is the true reason that the few who have not yet utterly bent the knee to the time-spirit are at once attracted by his subtlety of superficial observation and repelled by the absence of those deep underlying emotions which they have learned to expect in great literature. He has written out his reading of life in *The Woods of Westermain*, and the heart of his reading is at the end of his glorification of Change as the wondrous renovator and revealer:

> Change, the strongest son of Life,
> Has the Spirit here to wife.

Perhaps we do not often enough consider the profound innovation that such a sentiment indicates, nor look unflinchingly into the great gulf that is separating our little space of time from all that has preceded. Innumerable poets of the past have reflected on the law of mutability and on its part and meaning in human destiny, and their testimony, until this moment of ours, has been almost universally that which Spenser sang so exquisitely well in the unfinished book of *The Faerie Queene*:

> What man that sees the ever-whirling wheele
> Of *Change*, the which all mortall things doth sway,
> But that therby doth find, and plainly feele,
> How MUTABILITY in them doth play
> Her cruell sports, to many mens decay?

No doubt there is much to admire in our modern poets, with the great name of Tennyson at their head, who have bowed down in the temple of the idol of Mutability. They have many traits of beauty and strength; they tease us with subtle appeals to the heart and brain; they write from a wide and complicated experience, and their concern over 'the hopeless tangle of the age' gives them often an air of profundity; yet withal they leave us doubting whether there is in them the solid stuff to endure. Some deeper satisfaction or assurance is wanting to their work, and they themselves seem in a way transitional and transitory, as their themes and their very rhythms spring from the spirit of change. If any one thing may be called certain in criticism, it is that the quintessence of poetical emotion, the very kernel of the bittersweet passion of life and the world, arises from the simultaneous perception in man's destiny of the

ever-fleeting and of that which is *contrayr to mutabilitie*. The contrast takes a thousand forms and conceals itself under many obscure disguises, but always, if you search deeply, you will discover its presence in the passages of verse, or even of prose, that stir in the reader's heart the lasting response of art. If illustrations are necessary, the most familiar are the best. Thus Andrew Marvell, in the poem inscribed *To His Coy Mistress*, starts suddenly from the contemplation of her several charms to that never-forgotten outcry:

> But at my back I always hear
> Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near,
> And yonder all before us lie
> Deserts of vast eternity.

In those lines, more perhaps than anywhere else in English, the coming together of change and changelessness, the conflict between the passionate desire of ephemeral beauty and the motionless depths of man's eternal nature, rises to a sublimity that is closer to fear than to pleasure. Oftener it speaks the language of regret or wistful playfulness, as in Waller's inimitable descant on the old, old theme:

> Go, lovely Rose!
> Tell her that wastes her time and me—

where the sting of the pathos is due to a kind of pretty condescension of the spirit to the transitory symbols of time. When I consider all the richness of emotional content that must go out of poetry with the loss in our consciousness of anything 'stayed upon the pillars of eternity', I am filled with concern for the future of letters. Already the

impoverishment of Victorian literature in this respect is notable, and even where the contrast between the two spheres of our nature is implied it comes generally with a significant assimilation of the higher to the lower; as in the well-known couplet of William Cory's *Mimnermus in Church*:

> But oh, the very reason why
> I clasp them, is because they die.

The Victorian age, even more than others, was a time of transition. It has passed, and one thing at least is sure: we shall have no great literature again until we have looked once more within our own breasts and learned that there is something in human nature besides an *indefinite congeries of changes*. As it is now the very mould and *genre* of the higher emotion have been lost. It is almost inconceivable, for example, that a true tragedy should be composed to-day; for the tragic character, whether it be Antigone breaking herself magnanimously in the name of the unwritten eternal laws against the edicts of Creon, or Œdipus bruised and blinded by his ignorance of the divine purpose but caught up after years of submission into mystic fellowship with the gods, or Hamlet musing undecided while he listens to the fateful voices—everywhere the tragic mood depends on the unresolved conflict in human motives between the universal and the particular, the changeless law and the temporal passion. It even seems that, with the disappearance of the greater form, there is passing away the ambition to write greatly. And naturally. For if the permanence of a work of art is due to its fit expression of the permanent in

human desire and experience, what room is there for the long hope, or what impulse to sacrifice present popularity for enduring fame, when the very notion has become discredited of any principle contrary to ceaseless change?

I have been concerned here primarily with literature, but obviously the destiny of literature is bound up with that of the practical world. If the disregard of permanence means formlessness and the absence of the higher emotion in letters, it means the same thing in society; nor under the existing worship of change, whether economic theory follows the individualism of Cobden or the collectivism of Karl Marx, can there be any escape for civilization from the present dominance of material forces. Relax those brutal bulwarks against the inrush of ungoverned change and the result is simple anarchy. Nor is there real hope from the mitigating influence of that humanitarian sympathy which has accompanied the growth of scientific intellectualism; for such sympathy is but another aspect of the same absorption in change, being an attempt of the individual to flow, so to speak, in the direction of every emotional impact from the world. It contains no power of resistance or principle of restraint, but tends on the contrary to make man a more helpless prey of the ever-encroaching flood. The only salvation is in the recognition of some superior guiding and dividing law of just rule and right subordination, in the perception, that is, of something permanent within the flux.

There is need of firm hearts and clear brains to bring us out of this slough of indifference, but

unfortunately the strong men are too often paralysed by a curious superstition of words. The saying has gone abroad that strength means joy in change and that he who would question change is reactionary and effeminate; and so in the name of progress and virility we drift supinely with the current. If by reactionary is understood only the man who shudders at all innovation and who cries out for some impossible restoration of the past, the charge is well made. Such a man in the social realm corresponds to the metaphysician who would deny the existence of change and the many for an exclusive and sterile idealism of the one. But reaction may be, and in the true sense is, something utterly different from this futile dreaming; it is essentially to answer action with action, to oppose to the welter of circumstance the force of discrimination and selection, to direct the aimless tide of change by reference to the co-existing law of the immutable fact, to carry the experience of the past into the diverse impulses of the present, and so to move forward in an orderly progression. If any young man, feeling now within himself the power of accomplishment, hesitates to be called a reactionary, in this better use of the term, because of the charge of effeminacy, let him take courage. The world is not contradicted with impunity, and he who sets himself against the world's belief will have need of all a man's endurance and all a man's strength. The adventurous soul who to-day against the reigning scientific and pragmatic dogma would maintain no vague and equally one-sided idealism, but the true duality of the one and the many, the absolute and the relative, the permanent and the

mutable, will find himself subjected to an intellectual isolation and contempt almost as terrible as the penalties of the inquisition, and quite as effective in producing a silent conformity. If a man doubts this, let him try, and learn. Submission to the philosophy of change is the real effeminacy; it is the virile part to react.

PROSSER HALL FRYE

1866–

THE IDEA OF GREEK TRAGEDY (1922)[1]

Ἐγὼ δὲ τέχνην οὐ καλῶ ὃ ἂν ᾖ ἄλογον πρᾶγμα.
GORGIAS.

IT is not infrequently objected to the practice of generalizing on literary topics that it tends to transform what is properly a creature of flesh and blood into a lifeless, if symmetrical, figure of abstraction. In some respects the charge is just. To suppose that Sophocles wrote the Antigone in conscious illustration of a dramatic formula, would be totally to mistake the process of literary creation. He wrote it because he liked the subject and found it suggestive: as we say nowadays, he saw something in it. But even in this case it is perfectly legitimate to analyse and define the kind of thing that appealed to him and the kind of thing that he succeeded in making out of it as far as his impressions and methods are uniform. In other words, it is possible to determine the character of his work as a whole even at the risk of neglecting the specific play of feature and circumstance which lends every individual performance its own peculiar vivacity. And the same sort of treatment is equally feasible with the body of Greek tragedy—or for that matter, with tragedy considered as a universal *genre*.

And further, even though the Greeks, like other tragedians, worked freely, according to their own

[1] Reprinted from *Romance and Tragedy* with the permission of Marshall Jones Co.

genius, in the stuff that pleased them, without reference to rule or prescription; even so, it is none the less certain that they proceeded in accordance with certain general ideas and habits of thought. At all events, in order to understand what they have done, we should naturally have to take it up in some general expression, which at most would represent, not necessarily their manner of creating it or our manner of enjoying it, but merely our manner of disposing of it. No one pretends, I suppose, that the physical or mechanical principles which help us to make sense of the rainbow, offer any adequate equivalent for our joy in it, or even that it was ever made in deliberate demonstration of such principles. And while I should hardly care to institute a comparison between scientific and critical generalization, there is sufficient analogy between the two cases to illustrate the fact that as the sole condition of dealing intelligently with a number of details, we are obliged to gather them into our minds in a broad and systematic way. And while, again, I would not be so rash as to say that any dramatist ever harboured any such views as I am about to utter concerning Greek drama; yet I do believe that some such conception—if not mine, then that of another more happy—is involved in that drama and is a fair expression of the manner in which it arranges itself, when it does arrange itself, in our heads. For after all it is necessary to remember that the creation of a play and its comprehension are two very different things.

On the other hand, I am as far from pretending to say anything novel as I am from expressing the visions and raptures of genius. Not only has Aris-

totle occupied this ground before me; but he has in some sense told the whole story once for all. Not that every just remark, which has since been made on the subject, derives directly from Aristotle. But while it would appear ridiculous to father all subsequent ideas upon him, yet it is true that whatever is justly said in this matter does array itself naturally under his authority, almost as an explanation or extension of his teaching. If I can only classify the facts, therefore, from a single point of view so that they will all hang together and take on that air of intellectual consistency which results from the possibility of considering a number of particulars in one light and under one angle, I shall think my purpose satisfactorily accomplished. The aim of criticism must always consist, in the first instance, in making its subject intelligible by reducing it to a single set of relationships.

I

Like every other work of literature a tragedy is the product of two factors. There is, first, the crude stuff or substance, fact or invention—the 'myth' or 'fable', as it used to be called, the 'story', as it is called nowadays—which serves as the foundation of the action; and second, the handling or treatment, the 'art', which gives this raw material its literary value. It is only by a kind of license that we can speak of an event, whether real or imaginary, as a tragedy. In such a case we are merely availing ourselves of a handy theatrical figure. Literally, we are justified in saying at most that such an occurrence might possible yield a tragedy if properly worked up and presented. Even

in the common manner of speaking the force of the figure depends on a recognition of the necessity of dramatic elaboration for genuinely tragic effect. In other words, a tragedy is not a work of nature but of art.

Like the treatment, however, the myth or story itself, upon which the tragedy is founded, should have a special character of its own. It is probably a vague recognition of the circumstance that every transaction indifferently is not proper material for tragic handling, which confines the popular application of the term to certain occurrences in real life, however capricious and inexact this application of the word is likely to be. In short, tragedy is not wholly an affair of manner any more than it is wholly an affair of matter. The substance must be suitable; and it can be so only when it is of a sort to violate our feeling of moral congruity or fitness. That is to say, the tragic story or fable should involve a discrepancy between our sense of fact, as illustrated in the incidents of the action, on the one hand, and on the other, our conception of justice and right reason. And it is just this disheartening consciousness of inconsistency, implicit in the perception of the dramatic data, as between our knowledge of things as they are or seem to be and our vision of them as they should be, which it is one of the duties of the tragic dramatist to reinforce and deepen by his treatment.

At first sight it may seem something of a paradox to rest tragedy upon the same general basis, the appreciation of incongruity, as that upon which it has become usual to rest comedy. And yet it has been observed again and again that as far as the

mere dramatic substratum is concerned, there is no essential difference between tragedy and comedy: the same premises may serve for either according to circumstances. As Vinet, for one, has pointed out, the subject of *Mithridate* is identical with that of *L'Avare*—the fifth scene of the third act in the former play utilizing exactly the same situation as the third scene of the fourth act in the latter; while between *Mahomet* and *Tartuffe*, and *Andromaque* and *Ricochets*, to mention only obvious instances, there is an unmistakable likeness of the same kind. And yet how different the effect! The truth is, incongruity may stir very different emotions under different circumstances.

In the case of comedy it is the sense of decorum and convention, rather than any graver feeling, which is offended. A violation of the proprieties, an inconsistency of character, a contrariety of circumstances—of such is the fabric of comedy. In spite of its tragic possibilities *Le Misanthrope* arouses, as a matter of fact, no profound distrust, it stirs no serious misgivings. That a prig of Alceste's stamp should so far belie his professions as to fall in love with a trifling flirt like Célimène, arouses much the same feeling, under Molière's management, as that a man in irreproachable evening clothes, to borrow an example from Professor Sully, should slip and fall into the mud. To the intelligent observer the one experience is, of course, much more interesting than the other. The latter is wholly superficial and fortuitous. The former is rooted in human nature and furnishes a better pasturage for that sort of intellectual curiosity and amusement which it is the business of the comic poet to elicit

from his themes as it is the business of the tragic poet to elicit from his the motifs proper to his own *genre*.

In the case of tragedy, on the contrary, the incongruity is such as to shock profoundly the moral prepossessions of the race—to shake, if not to unsettle, confidence in the moral order, in the moral reality of the universe. The sacrifice of a girl so innocent and ingenuous as Iphigenia to the indirections of her father's ambitious policy, or that of a woman so elevated and disinterested as Antigone to state's reason and municipal convenience, is in itself a direct attack upon the observer's faith in a supreme equity, in a just apportionment of human lots. Nor is it otherwise with *Mithridate* as compared with *L'Avare*. The spectacle of a ravenously avaricious character like Harpagon in the throes of a passion so extravagant as love, presents an extremely curious and amusing case of ethical casuistry—nothing more; while the exposure of Monime in her maiden decorum to the jealous inquisition of her tigerish master is enough to confound belief in the equitable regulation of mortal affairs.

It is this sort of thing that I should like to call the tragic qualm—this feeling of insecurity and confusion, as it were a sort of moral dizziness and nausea, due to the vivid realization, in the dramatic fable, of a suspicion which is always lurking uncomfortably near the threshold of consciousness, that the world is somehow out of plumb. Herein lies the genuine 'clash' of tragedy, as it has been called—not in a mere collision of persons or interests or even of ideas within the confines of the play

itself, but rather in the contradiction life is perpetually opposing to our human values and standards.

To be sure, our sensibility for this sort of thing is rather blunt at present. This is not a tragic age. Nor is it essentially a moral one. But for all that there are times when the tragic qualm, inherent as it is in the nature of things rather than of art, obtrudes itself irresistibly. The wanton assassination of the most inoffensive of our presidents is a case in point—as is the senseless obliteration of an entire population by earthquake, volcanic upheaval, or other cataclysm. I grant that even these tremendous catastrophes are beginning to lose their terrors for the popular imagination in the rapid extension of a civilization preponderantly material. But at the same time, though such matters are not of themselves proper for tragedy for a reason that I shall assign in a few minutes, yet they do still stir in thoughtful natures the kind of feeling peculiar to the tragic fact as such; they raise again the horrifying old distrust of nature and her dealings with her creature. Like every lapse of reason, like every intrusion or irruption of the irrational or the unintelligible into the sphere of human interests, they threaten again the security of man's dearest illusions, they trouble his spirit and fill him with nameless apprehensions for the sanity and good faith of that order in which humanity with its quivering and importunate conscience is helplessly and irrevocably involved. For after all the tragic qualm is perhaps nothing more or less than a sudden and appalling recognition of our desperate plight in a universe apparently indiscriminate of good and evil as of happiness and misery.

Without the tragic qualm, then, in the dramatic data there is no tragedy. But this is not enough; it is but preliminary—in Plato's words, *τὰ πρὸ τραγῳδίας*. It is necessary that the qualm should be allayed, that the quarrel between the certainties of experience and the exactions of conscience should be composed, and that confidence should be restored. In addition to making sure of the emotions proper to his stuff in itself, the poet must also manage in such a way as to answer the question mutely propounded by his fable: if such things can be, what becomes of the law of eternal righteousness as given in the heart of man? Such is the question which the drama, as 'the imitation of an action', forces relentlessly upon the attention of the audience. And the whole function of tragedy, as a literary *genre*, is to resolve this doubt, in one way or another, through the medium of the action, but of the action as a dramatic, not as an actual, performance. Otherwise, there is no art—nothing but a dull dead stereotype of reality with all its contradictions, incoherences, and inconsequences—and with all its resultant incredibility. Senseless assassination or aimless annihilation may indeed present a problem, but the problem is insoluble. And where there is no solution, either by fault of the circumstances or by fault of the poet, there is no genuine tragedy.

If I may venture for a little while into the thicket of critical exegesis, this or something very like it seems to me to be what Aristotle had in mind in speaking of the 'purgation of the passions' as the end of tragic poetry. The eventual relaxation of the emotions of pity and horror, which were char-

acteristic of the tragic qualm as it affected the sensibilities of the Greek by reason of certain conditions which I shall have the temerity to discuss before long—the eventual relaxation and alleviation of these emotions by some adjustment or other, after their violent excitation by the representation of the action, appears to satisfy the Aristotelian definition of tragedy, as *δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου περαίνουσα τὴν τῶν τοιούτων παθημάτων κάθαρσιν* as accomplishing through pity and horror the purgation of these selfsame passions. But in any case—and this is the point after all—what is indisputable is the sharp distinction drawn by the *Poetics* between the myth and its handling, between the action as an imitation and an initiation—or, in other words, between life and literature. And in the light of the distinction it can hardly be denied that Aristotle regarded as indispensable some such final accommodation as I have tried to indicate. Without some such reconciliation of experience with conscience, without some adjustment of the course of events to the principles of human nature, he could not have conceived of a tragedy in the proper sense.

It is through this solution, as I have called it in customary fashion, that tragedy acquires its significance, as it acquires its poignant sense of reality through its presentation of the tragic problem implicit in its imitation of an action. While it is by the latter avenue that life enters tragedy, ideas enter it through the former. In this manner verisimilitude on the one part and moral consistency on the other become necessary attributes of the tragic poem. But even in the first case, in the case of the

fable itself, it is as much the dramatist's vision which is involved as his observation. The success of his action, even as imitation, depends mainly upon his eye for the problem. What affects the audience is his fidelity, not so much to a certain order of phenomena, as to a certain order of emotions. In a word, the verisimilitude of his drama, and hence its reality, is measured, in the last resort, not by the exactitude with which he is seen to reproduce the spectators' own sensations, but by the justice with which he is felt to have voiced the tragic qualm.

II

Of the technical elements of tragedy in general I have said nothing. I am concerned with what may be called its intellectual bases alone. I have assumed the dramatic *genre* with all its appurtenances and properties. And I have taken for granted as sufficiently obvious of itself that the rational premises of tragedy are expressed and to a certain extent conceived in terms of sensation and emotion. The kind of story in which the problem is sensibly embodied and through which the tragic qualm is emotionally communicated, together with the manner of treatment whereby the solution is intimated, will depend upon the character of the drama and its inspiration. Naturally, too, the specific feelings to which the tragic qualm is determined, will vary with the dramatist's sense of the tragic problem—as will the pacification with his convictions religious or otherwise—as these may be affected by his natural disposition and the civilization in which he finds himself. If the tragic problem of Shake-

speare and the Elizabethans is compared with that of Sophocles and the Athenians, it will be found to arise from quite another notion of the fatal incongruities of life and to be differently constituted with respect to its emotional notes, while the solutions tacitly proposed by the two dramas will naturally diverge to an equal extent.

With Shakespeare the tragic dissonance or 'clash' would seem to engage as between man's possibilities or pretensions and his fate. The incompatibility of his desires and aspirations, which are illimitable, with the conditions which actually dispose of him —mean, trivial, absurd, belittling as they may be, but always at odds with his higher nature and impulses and frequently ruinous of his life and happiness—something like this would appear to be what moved Shakespeare most in his graver moods. The contrast between what humanity might or should be and what as a matter of fact it may become by the accidents of existence—herein lies the discord at the root of his tragedy. A being of inexhaustible capacity, noble in reason, infinite in faculty, godlike in apprehension, reduced to a mere quintessence of dust—a Hamlet whose world is out of joint or an Othello 'fall'n in the practice of a damned slave', such is the Shakespearean protagonist.

> This man so great that all that is, is his,
> Oh, what a trifle and poor thing he is!

In short, Shakespeare's tragedy, like romantic tragedy in general, is a tragedy of circumstances; hence the 'low' and 'comic' elements with which pseudo-classicism used to reproach it. To regard

a business like the graveyard scene in *Hamlet* as a side-issue or a sop to the groundlings, as apologetic criticism was once fond of doing, is to miss the point. There may be some excuse for disliking it when done, but Shakespeare knew what he was about when he did it. In its violent affront to the ideal dignity of Hamlet's situation at the moment when he is tottering precariously on the edge of his own grave as of Ophelia's, in its fantastic contradiction of the Hamlet of abstraction by the Hamlet of fatuity it is of the very essence of Shakespearean tragedy. The objection that such a scene is out of keeping with the seriousness of the emergency is true enough; but it is equally pointless, for the tragedy consists in just this affront to human dignity, this outrage to the sacredness of the individual. That such an objection should ever have been made, argues a gross misunderstanding, not only of the manner in which he conceived the tragic problem, but also of the nature of his tragic irony, so different from Sophocles'. 'That is the glory of Shakespeare,' Tennyson is reported to have said, 'that he can give you the incongruity of things.' Even about his comic characters in their more sober aspects hangs the atmosphere of fortuitous calamity. It is what gives Falstaff his grip upon our sympathies; he ought, it seems, to be so much nobler than he is. For Shakespeare's mixture of comic and tragic is not confined to a mere intermingling of scenes of one sort with those of another; it resides in a kind of duplicity of conception, which is, perhaps, humorous rather than comic. Just as the lighter characters like Falstaff may catch a reflection of pathos from being in some manner the

victims of untoward circumstances, so his tragic characters too may be slightly ridiculous for the same reason, like Othello gulping Iago's innuendoes or Macbeth gaping at the witches. At all events, from the nature of the case his tragic heroes, for all their wilfulness and violence, are always a little pitiable as well as pathetic, like poor old Lear. About them all is a little something of Coleridge —one reason, perhaps, that he is able to speak of them with so much intelligence and sympathy. Such is, no doubt, the unavoidable weakness of a drama in which fatality has been displaced by necessity. If there is a principle presiding over the course of Shakespeare's action it is the law of causation, in accordance with which the quarry is finally run down by a pack of consequences, more or less incidental, with whose inception his own character has little or nothing to do, however it may appear, as the only constant and predicable element, to determine the outcome, very much as the duration of the hunt might be said, regardless of the hounds, to depend upon the endurance and cunning of the fox. After all, the problem set by Shakespeare is simply how a man of such and such possibilities could go to the ground. The answer consists in tracing the circumstantial conspiracy, the causal succession by which he has been brought to such a pass, together with its effect upon his character. Transfer Hamlet and Othello, and the tragedy becomes unthinkable. How long would it have taken the former to unmask Iago or the latter to settle with Claudius?

Hence the curious result, as compared with the Greek, that whatever their fortunes, Shakespeare's

protagonists are morally accountable only for their intentions. It is impossible, of course, to deny that Hamlet pays the penalty of his acts, such as they are, in the sense that he endures the event; but he is in no wise answerable to the audience for the predicament in which he finds himself, as is, for example, the Hippolutus of Euripides. On the contrary, not only does Macbeth suffer the consequences of his conduct, he participates in their odium as well, on the strength of the malevolence of his motives. The latter is adjudged a criminal, the former is not. At the same time, there is a striking want of concurrence between verdict and sentence. Inoffensive as he is, Hamlet comes off no better than Macbeth. The tragedy is the same in both cases—the ruin of a promising career. In the one instance justice is felt to have been done; in the other not. Why, then, the identical issue? In short, for the tragic problem implicit in his representation of life Shakespeare has no moral solution. He seems to say: Such is the way of the world; to be sure, it offends your sense of fitness that humanity should be liable to these wretched contingencies, but what would you have? Life

> is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

In default of a final impression of moral consistency as between the hero's deserts and his apportionment, the consternation of the spectators is composed by a feeling which is left with them of the sympathetic superiority of the victim over the forces to which he succumbs. In spite of his in-

sufficiency it is impossible not to rate Hamlet or Lear above the whole conspiracy to which he falls a victim. In this way the tragic qualm, as I have called it, is allayed after a fashion; the audience is reconciled to the catastrophe—otherwise there would be no tragic effect at all. Such a conclusion, however, is purely sentimental and lenitive; there is no reassertion of the moral order, no catharsis of the passions to which the qualm is due. It is not by his solution, to speak exactly, that Shakespeare is great. Perhaps the kind of incongruity on which he based his drama is incapable of moral reconciliation. At all events, it is, as a matter of fact, to the terrific vividness with which he pictures the plight of humanity in a world of unscrupulous eventualities and draws its consequences for the character of the individual that his greatness is due. Hence the individuality of his drama and its title to the common designation, tragedy of character.

Such, as I conceive the matter, are the fundamental ideas of Shakespearean tragedy, which is in most respects a fair type of romantic tragedy in general. By comparison, the problem of Greek tragedy has to do with the effect of an action, as such, in promoting human happiness or misery; while the solution seeks to justify the issue by attaching to the action concerned a corresponding moral quality of good or evil. It is not a concern for happiness in itself which differentiates the Greek tragedy from the Shakespearean; on the whole, it is rather a concern for the correlation of happiness and righteousness. But as far as the representation itself goes, all tragedy, as a matter of fact, is alike

eudaemonistic in referring immediately to the instinct of happiness as sole umpire of the *dénouement* or *metabasis*. If life were suddenly to be conceived as a discipline of suffering, a school of character alone, without reference to the welfare of the individual, our tragedy would have to be recast. I do not see how Lear or Oedipus could be regarded, on such a supposition, as a tragic figure. Indeed, in the *Oedipus Coloneus*, where Sophocles has taken this view to some extent and has modified the postulates of tragedy in some measure to suit it, the impression produced is not wholly a tragic one. The shock to the sensibilities upon which depends the effect of the action in tragedy, as distinguished from that of its resolution, consists capitally in seeing humanity fail, by some outrageous *contre-temps* or other, of the well-being to which it instinctively thinks itself entitled. And the peculiar feeling or quality of feeling which makes the qualm of one tragedy differ from that of another is due, not to a care or a neglect of such a natural expectation, but to the particular manner in which it is raised to be disappointed—that is, finally to the character of the two parties to the collision, that which serves to raise the hope or expectation and that which serves to disappoint it.

Now in Shakespeare this collision or clash was seen to grow out of an inconsistency between the fairness of human promise or appearance and the dubiousness of mortal performance—or in terms of feeling, between the expectations raised by the hero's personality and the disappointment caused by his subsequent career. In Greek tragedy, on the other hand, preoccupied as it is with the ends

of action and its relation to prosperity, the collision originates in a discrepancy between the hero's conduct and its consequences—between the favourable expectations raised by his action and the deplorable results that actually ensue from it, as when an act calculated to ensure success is in reality productive of calamity. But of the probable outcome of an act there is morally only one prognostic—the intention or purpose of its author. Acts of which happiness may consistently be predicted, whose termination ought to be prosperous, are those whose intentions are good—or at least innocent. When such an act, deserving in itself of approval, turns out disastrously, like Antigone's celebration of her brother's funeral rites, there is bound to follow a strong feeling of amazement and dismay. The conscience is deeply shocked; and there arises that peculiar sense of vertiginous insecurity which I have called for convenience the tragic qualm.

In this connection it is worthy of remark that in Greek you are always pretty sure what the protagonist is going to do. He seldom or never disappoints you; whereas in Shakespeare the protagonist's behaviour is always more or less doubtful until it is settled for ever by the inertia of the action. That Orestes will kill his mother is certain from the first; he has come to do so and do so he will—he acts consistently in the spirit of his intention: what is uncertain is the consequence of his doing so. Whether Hamlet will kill the king or not is always pretty much a matter of conjecture before he has done so. In fact that is just the question. In the one case it is Hamlet's character which is on trial; in the other it is Orestes' act.

From this shift of dramatic emphasis has resulted a difference in the treatment of character which is no less significant of the romantic tragedy as compared with the Greek. While the Greek protagonist is calculated solely with reference to the action, whose moral character is reflected upon him; the Shakespearean has developed a character of his own which is partly implicated in the action but is also partly independent of it and uncommitted to it. The former is an agency, not an end in himself. It is not he to whom the action is indebted for its main interest and its peculiar effects, but contrariwise. In consequence, he exists only in and for the play; or what amounts to the same thing, there is no more of him than is necessary to motive the drama, with which he is virtually coterminous. On this account he has simplicity, breadth, and integrity—he possesses a general, abstract, and typical value—to which his modern rival can make no pretension. He represents the fates and liabilities of human life rather than the varieties and variations of human nature.

The Shakespearean character, on the other hand, as a personality more or less inviolable and sentimentally superior to the mere circumstances of his lot, appears to live with a larger life than that of the action, with which his character is only partially identified. Who ever dreams of measuring Hamlet or Othello or Lear—or even Macbeth for that matter—solely by what he does? Such is the variety, richness, and complexity—such is the ethical interest of his character that it is impossible to confound him with his fate, even while one bewails the pity of it. In retaining his apart-

ness and distinction he preserves a kind of saving grace or eminence in his downfall which makes it dramatically endurable. He remains uncompromised because he seems so much more important than the catastrophe, or indeed, than the whole play itself. He stretches away, as it were, indefinitely beyond the boundaries of the drama in which he figures—often meanly enough in comparison with the impression of his psychological significance. There is hardly one of all the company who does not occasionally let slip some evidence to a trait of character which is not involved in the piece or required by it—some hint or reminiscence as though of a previous state of existence. Indeed, so complex is their consciousness that it occasionally splits up or divides against itself to the detriment of the dramatic action. It is as much Hamlet's dissension with himself as anything else which embarrasses the tragedy. For these reasons it is possible to talk—yes, and to dispute so much about any of Shakespeare's main personages: there appears to be so much more of them than the action is adequate to account for that the remainder, the extra-mural portion, is an inexhaustible subject of speculation and conjecture. Hence the fascination of what may be called the private character of his *dramatis personae*, which manifests itself in innumerable odd ways—in biographies of his heroines' girlhood, in discussions of Hamlet's whereabouts and occupations before the curtain went up, even in reference to Lear's and Cordelia's compensation in another world.

That the stage has gained in a way by this treatment of character is undeniable. But what it has

gained in one way it has lost in another. Though it has gained in curiousness, in variety, or what we like to call human interest; it has as surely lost in dramatic and literary consistency. That the characters should outgrow the action and cease to be solely the creatures and servants of the drama is impossible without impairing the accurate adjustment of parts and functions, the nice application of means to ends upon which depends the perfection of art in general and of dramatic art in particular —without introducing an element of excess or superfluity, a principle of disorder which tends to warp and sprain the play. The fact is that the Shakespearean *dramatis personae* are too big for the mimic world which they feign to inhabit; they are themselves realities masquerading in a world of fiction; they belong, not to the stage, but to existence. Dare I say so—they are too natural, particularly the women? I confess that to me at least it seems at times a little incongruous, even a little grotesque, to watch these intensely animated characters, complex with all the complexity of life, gesticulating, grimacing, frowning, smiling, running the gamut of a thousand expressions and inflections, bustling about with all the irresponsible vivacity of nature, 'in a fiction, in a dream of passion', amid a factitious and highly artificial scene clapped together transparently enough out of a few bits of painted canvas, a rickety slide or two, and a set of flimsy hangings, the whole bounded by an arc of garish footlights and a row of staring spectators. On the contrary, the Greek actor in his buskins, his mask, his robe and trappings, with his restrained gestures and intonations,

may seem a singular figure when deprived of his appropriate accompaniments. But put him in his place, in the midst of a scene and an action carefully insulated, to say the least, from actuality; and he ceases to be grotesque or incongruous: he and his surroundings are of a sort.

In one particular, however—in the nature of the actions imitated and in the fidelity of the imitation—it must be acknowledged that Greek tragedy bears no little likeness to the Elizabethan: quite enough, indeed, to justify the numerous parallels that have been drawn between them, and even to support the contention that Shakespeare's is the likest of all tragedy to the Athenian. Nor is the similarity so very extraordinary after all. There is naturally a kind of family resemblance among all the members of a *genre*. From this particular point of view life is bound to present pretty much the same aspect whoever views it. The frightful rivalry and competition, the monstrous waste of life, the atrocious expense of suffering, which are the very conditions of existence on the planet—from such sources all tragedy indifferently must draw its materials, which are much more elemental and simple than the comparatively artificial and complex interests of comedy. But it is true that the Greeks and Shakespeare are alike in looking at these things far more piercingly and nakedly than the poets of any other nation. They see the facts more nearly and distinctly through fewer veils and conventions. And there is, in consequence, a kind of unflinching realism about their representation of the tragic data which carries them a long way in company. Parricide, matricide, suicide, infanticide, rape,

incest, insanity, sacrilege—these formed the stock in trade of the one as of the other. But such a likeness is more or less superficial, touching the matter rather than the spirit. It is the resolution, the accommodation between experience and conscience, which is vital. And here, it must be acknowledged, the Athenian takes leave of the Elizabethan. While the latter was content to exhibit 'the weary weight of all this unintelligible world' with hardly more than a sentimental palliative for its atrocities, the former boldly attacked the problem involved in the frustration of human happiness, and by reconciling the discrepancy at its root, succeeded in allaying the spectators' apprehensions for the miscarriage of justice, at the same time relieving and relaxing the passions excited by such a spectacle in a manner to suggest the Aristotelian metaphor of a moral catharsis.

Specifically, his problem, as he saw the riddle of the universe reflected in the legendary and heroic mischances with which he worked, was this: why should an act which is performed with virtuous or blameless intent and which is to all appearance good and meritorious in itself, work irreparable mischief for its author? In order to answer this question he undertook to show, or rather to convey the impression, that such an act, whatever its motives, was in reality committed in violation of moral law, and that, so far from being innocent or even indifferent, it was, as a matter of fact, subversive of order and discipline. In other words, it was not merely inexpedient but wicked, and on that account properly liable to disaster; while its perpetrator himself was not merely unlucky or unhandy, but criminal as

well and therefore obnoxious to correction and punishment.

To take Sophocles, the maturest and clearest expression of Greek tragedy, as an example—his whole theatre seems to presuppose some universal and abstract principle of law and order, *ὥστ' ἄγραπτα κἀσφαλῆ θεῶν νόμιμα* presiding over existence—a kind of moral police, to put it crudely—which provided automatically and of itself for the regulation of human affairs and for the execution and removal of disturbers, who, if suffered with impunity, would unsettle the equilibrium of earthly things. Any deed, done in contravention of this principle or law, however innocent might be its motives, was essentially criminal, as involving in fact a breach of the moral peace. Ignorance itself, like rectitude of intention, constituted no defense, though dramatically they both served to recommend the offender to the sympathies of the beholders—in short, to qualify him a tragic character; for otherwise his fate would have no particular interest—it would be a clear case of retribution, raising no doubt and occasioning no qualm. As for the remoter mystery between the law and the culprit's conscience—with this Sophocles has little or nothing to do; he is content to leave such matters, as too high for him, between the knees of the gods. Only once, in *Œdipus Coloneus*, he attempts something like a vindication of their purposes. But as a general thing, what he is concerned for—and in this particular his preoccupation is sufficiently unlike ours to make its appreciation difficult—is to demonstrate the moral consistency of life as against a purely casual or mechani-

cal coincidence and to assign to men's actions specifically human and intelligible values of good and evil in place of the neutral and noncommital attributions of right and wrong to their good or ill success—

> ὧν νόμοι πρόκεινται
> ὑψίποδες, οὐρανίαν
> δι' αἰθέρα τεκνωθέντες ὧν Ὄλυμπος
> πατὴρ μόνος, οὐδέ νιν
> θνατὰ φύσις ἀνέρων
> ἔτικτεν, οὐδὲ μήποτε λάθα κατακοιμάσῃ,
> μέγας ἐν τούτοις θεός, οὐδὲ γηράσκει.

Nor was this interpretation due to a confusion of nomenclature, as has often been assumed. Sophocles was no dupe of a vocabulary. Rather, if there were such a confusion of vocabulary at all, it was a concomitant result, with this interpretation, of the spirit of those who used the language. The conviction of the correlation of misery with wickedness, of prosperity with righteousness, together with what we should call the indifference to motives, which inspired the solution of Greek tragedy, was not confined to Sophocles and his fellow playwrights. It suffused the consciousness of the Greeks. The happy man was the good man; or, as we say, for the idea is not without modern echoes, he was the man who had done well. In fact, so thoroughly was the identification ingrained in the popular mind, that there was a general prejudice against misfortune as in itself an impairment of character. But while the Greek temper was consistently moral, it was consistently intellectual too. Not only were the unhappy obviously wrong; but since no one acted ill knowingly, all wrongdoing was finally a form of ignorance or misjudg-

ment—that is, an error of some sort. Ignorance too was criminal. And while this conception of conduct was not pushed relentlessly to its logical conclusion—for Aristotle seems to discriminate in debarring from tragedy what can be only the man of evil impulses—yet it did tend to turn the Greek's attention from the motive-grubbing with which we are familiar and fix it upon the act and its consequences, which as a matter of fact furnish the only practical means of estimating the moral significance of character.

As a matter of curiosity, suppose we spend a few minutes in pushing Sophocles' conception to its logical conclusion. We must then arrive at some such conception as the following. In case there are acts which tend to violate or do actually violate the moral order, there must be a cosmic will or intention, since a moral order implies a corresponding scheme or plan. But what is this moral sense or purpose, this cosmic will? It cannot be necessity, for that frequently resists or contravenes the moral order, if actuality is to be taken as the index of necessity. Nor can it be a mere ascription or attribution on the part of our own moral character, for that would have no power to enforce its decrees. Nor can it be identified with the will of Zeus—certainly not the Aeschylean Zeus, nor even of an educated and properly advised Zeus such as is anticipated in the *Prometheus Bound*. Is it, then, simply inherent in the constitution of things? And if so, wholly material after all? For how did the universe get to be a moral affair? And here, I suppose, we reach the term of speculation. The cosmos was to Sophocles a moral cosmos, however

it came to be so, just as ours is a mechanical one though we cannot explain how or why, and, in fact, consider the query impertinent—partly, no doubt, because we cannot answer it. The force, however, which insures and sustains this moral order of Sophocles' is fate. In the dramatic economy of the tragedian it is fate which puts the moral order through.

III

With these general considerations in mind it is possible to dispose more or less systematically and intelligibly of several details which are usually handled in a rather empirical and disjointed fashion as notations of fact rather than as consequences of a principle.

In the first place, it ought to be clear from this point of view why Greek tragedy should manifest itself so frequently under a sort of typic form which has been described as a conflict of duties. In the light of the recent discussion it is obvious that through some such opposition as this the particular problem with which this tragedy has to do is at once set out in the strongest possible light and receives the most satisfactory and convincing solution. A protagonist, acting, as in the *Antigone*, with complete faith in the sacredness of his undertaking, only to discover in the end that so far from acquitting himself of his obligations he has actually incurred the penalty of an offense as serious to all intents and purposes as the debt which he has endeavoured to meet—such a character affords in his own person the most striking contrast between anticipation and fulfilment, and at the same time

suggests the most reasonable explanation of his disgrace. As his motives are the highest conceivable on the one part, so is the tragic anomaly of his fate the most shocking and bewildering; and as his transgression is patent and undeniable on the other part, so is the rehabilitation of the moral order equally certain and reassuring. In such wise the double requirement of Greek tragedy with respect to qualm and catharsis finds complete and ready satisfaction.

In this respect nothing could be more striking than the contrast with modern or Shakespearean tragedy. It is almost an unexceptional rule that the Greek protagonist ruins himself in the discharge of what he believes to be a duty—and not always an agreeable one at that; whereas the modern protagonist falls in the indulgence of his own desires. To the one fatality appears in the guise of an obligation; to the other in that of a temptation. Oedipus, Antigone, Orestes—it is not so much that they are following their own inclinations, or even what seems to them individually to be right and just, but what the audience too would unanimously recognize as such. And it is precisely this—the conviction of guilt, brought home to protagonist and audience under such circumstances—which makes the qualm of Greek tragedy. Indeed, I sometimes wonder whether tragedy in the highest sense can exist without such conviction of guilt, notwithstanding that it is, on the contrary, the conviction of innocence in like circumstances which makes the poignancy of modern tragedy. But not to quarrel over degrees and to accept the facts as they are, the difference is real and significant. If

the Greek protagonist is tragic by the conviction of guilt, where the modern is tragic by the conviction of innocence, it is that the former is led, by his devotion to what he thinks a just obligation or claim against his conscience, to incur the violation of some other engagement equally sacred and binding.

At the same time, simple as the matter seems when viewed in its proper connection, it is to this very source that much of the misunderstanding of Greek tragedy must be referred. Not infrequently has it happened that one of these obligations or the other has lost its authority for the modern conscience, with a resultant falsification of feeling for the situation. In a humanitarian age it is not surprising that Prometheus' offense against the celestial ordinance should appear a trifle as compared with his services to mankind and that he himself should have come to be a purely sympathetic and romantic character, such as Shelley has done his best to familiarize us with. With a weakening of the ancient civic sense, too, something of the same sort has happened to Antigone. But nevertheless it was originally this strict antinomy of approximately equal duties which afforded Greek tragedy one of the fairest opportunities for the production of its own peculiar effects, not the least notable of which was the characteristic duplicity of feeling it aroused for the protagonist.

This impression, composed of the two emotions, pity and horror, by which Aristotle defines tragedy —just these two and no others—is to be accounted for in the same way and by the same order of considerations as before. Not that Greek tragedy might not produce other emotions too—as a matter of

fact Aristotle himself has arranged for others; but such others are adscititious and incidental. Pity and horror alone are inherent in the idea of the species and essential to its formula. Since the action of the protagonist itself bears a double face or interpretation, in qualm and catharsis, the emotions of the audience are twofold also. In as far as it is well intended and directed to an end commendable enough in itself, it arouses pity for its devoted author, upon whose head it recoils with such fatal effect; while in as far as it is mischievous in fact, as it violates the celestial canon and jeopardizes the established order, it must needs arouse an equal horror for the rash and impious agitator who has ventured to trouble the tranquillity of men and gods. For the blind and passive sufferer of a fate so dismaying as that required to produce the tragic qualm, pity is the only possible emotion; as is horror for the malefactor convicted of a felony sufficiently monstrous to justify the judgment which overtakes him and so to work the revulsion of feeling necessary to the catharsis.

I do not wish to insist upon the moral import of tragedy unduly: I know how reproachful such remarks must seem to my own generation. At the same time I cannot leave this topic without a protest. While I do not think that tragedy ought to preach a sermon or read a lesson, it does seem to me that nothing can be more preposterous than the contention that Aristotle, in defining the *genre* by the emotions of pity and horror, meant to imply that its being is exclusively aesthetic, in the modern acceptation of the term, and devoid entirely of moral purpose or concern. As though pity and

horror were necessarily immoral or amoral emotions! As though it were not a kind of misnomer to speak of them as aesthetic emotions at all! That there are emotions which are exclusively aesthetic even in the straightened significance now given to the word, I have no doubt. But no one whose judgment has not been warped by the perversions of a latter-day criticism would dream of classing pity and horror among them. For what is there so likely to move the latter as the spectacle of blind and infatuate iniquity; so likely to move the former as the spectacle of sudden and staggering adversity? The conflict of good and evil, I believe, is still, for all our sophistication, the surest and deepest of all emotional appeals. And in view of the facts I can conceive nothing more impudent than the pretension to range Aristotle among the partisans of such a doctrine as *l'art pour l'art*, because he has formulated tragedy in terms of the very emotions which are most closely identified with our moral perceptions.

At the same time, pertinent as is his notation of that drama with which he was acquainted, it is a mistake to assume that his definition is true for tragedy in general or romantic tragedy in particular. Since neither problem nor solution is identical, as I have tried to show, it follows that the characteristic sentiment of the latter will be differently constituted with respect to its emotional notes. I do not mean to deny that pity and horror are in some sense elicited by every tragedy. They are both present to some extent and in some manner from the very nature of the *genre*. The apparent moral obliquity of the catastrophe, which is the

motive of the qualm—itself, as I have tried to show, a constant factor—is bound to raise a kind of horror, as also a kind of pity for the luckless actor. But these feelings are quite different in timbre from the passions to which the Greek play is conditioned by its peculiar interpretation of tragic actuality. They have not the same purity or the same consistency; they are not in a fixed and definite ratio decisive of the character of the drama; they are variable and indeterminate. As a rule, the modern protagonist is either a pathetic character, like Othello, or an antipathetic one, like Macbeth. Otherwise, in default of a solution authoritatively moral, we should be unable to bear his fate, to which we are reconciled, as I have already suggested, in the one case by an impression of his sentimental superiority to his situation, in the other case by a conviction of the poetical justice of his downfall. The active principle in the first case is sympathy; in the second, disapprobation. But sympathy is not identical with pity, or disapprobation with horror. And even when our feelings for the modern hero are mixed, these are, on the whole, the sentiments between which we are divided. What pity and horror we feel are caught up and engaged with these more or less loosely.

For an exhaustive discussion of the subject, however, this is hardly the place. All I wish to do here, is to point out that these two passions, pity and horror, are critical of Greek tragedy alone; and though they may enter into the general description of any tragedy, yet it is misleading to use them as a universal definition of the whole *genre* without reference to specific versions of the tragic paradox

and specific expedients for its accommodation. For as opinion changes with regard to the tragical contingencies of life—what they are and how humanity is to be reconciled to their existence; so must the feelings and sentiments voiced by the drama change also, and along with them the attitude toward the tragic character, whose qualifications will obviously be controlled by these very conditions. So it is with the modern protagonist. And it is by the same reasoning that Aristotle's discrimination against certain types as compared with certain others is to be explained and justified.

The main difficulty with Aristotle's doctrine of characters seems due to the fact that it makes no provision for the prevailing pathetic or prevailing antipathetic protagonist of later tragedy—in particular, and the saying has been thought a hard one, it disqualifies Macbeth and Richard III. But the fact is that such a type is not Greek; it does not conform to the double role for which the Greek protagonist was cast. While it is possible, of course, to rationalize the ruin of a thorough-paced villain by the law which he has violated, yet his downfall causes no dismay and inflicts no pang; it is just what ought to happen. Hence it offers no moral problem; in the eyes of the Greek there was nothing tragic about it. It might be calamitous for the villain; but objectively, for the audience it was a source of unalloyed satisfaction, just as his career was an occasion of unmigitated disgust. On the other hand, the virtuous or pathetic character is unfitted to the part for a contrary reason. While the sight of such a person suffering an untoward fate may indeed appear sufficiently enigmatical to

trouble the spectator and awaken his suspicions, yet the very nature of the case precludes the possibility of a moral settlement. In the adversity of the just there is neither reason nor consistency. As Aristotle says, it is simply shocking. And the difference of our own feeling in this respect serves to measure the interval between the two tragedies. On this account the only possible protagonist for the Athenian was the sort that we have had in mind all along—the fallible character, neither wholly good nor wholly bad, but liable to error. As such he is subject to pity by his infirmity and to horror by his iniquity—he is amenable equally to the requirements of problem and solution.

In addition to these features of Greek tragedy, which may be regarded as primary inasmuch as they derive immediately from its postulates and are necessary corollaries of its definition, there are others mentioned by Aristotle as incidental and ancillary. Their presence is the test of a complex, as distinguished from a simple action, which hinges solely upon a *metabasis* or reverse of fortune, while the former may also include a peripeteia, an agnition, and a sensation (πάθος).[1] As a matter of fact, then, these secondary characters are merely special devices for reinforcing the emotional impression of qualm and catharsis, which, as he observes, is more

[1] Though Aristotle fails to mention πάθος with περιπέτεια and ἀναγνώρισις as one of the differentiae of complex tragedy, he discusses it immediately in connection with these other two as a third part of the μῦθος. At the same time the *Prometheus Bound* is opened by a πάθος, if indeed the whole play is not one prolonged πάθος. Since the whole distinction is of no great importance in this connection, there is no particular use in discussing it here.

impressive when the incidents of the drama occur contrary to expectation, and still more so when they occur by reason of one another.[1] So a peripeteia is defined as an effect by which an antecedent produces, not the consequence expected, but one entirely unlooked for and yet necessary and intelligible. In much the same way an agnition is the recognition by a character of some person or object of whose identity he was at first unaware. As such an effect is likely to cause a revulsion of feeling and a change of intention on the part of the character concerned, it frequently though not invariably involves a peripeteia. A sensation, as I have ventured to translate the term *πάθος*, is a particularly harrowing incident, which, instead of being reported by messenger or otherwise, is enacted under the eyes of the spectators. As conducive of surprise and suspense, intensity and immediacy, these effects may be looked upon as elements of plot in the present connotation of the word. To be sure, they want the elaboration of the modern intrigue, where the dramatic action has come to be developed chiefly in the sense of the 'interesting' as the *dramatis personae* chiefly in the sense of the 'characteristic'. But though they have remained subject to the primary uses of tragedy in the enforcement

[1] *δι' ἄλληλα*. Hardly by cause and effect in the modern connotation, as the case of Mitys' statue at Argos proves. The connection in Aristotle's mind, I venture to think, was moral, not physical. Of course I do not mean to imply that Aristotle was without the notion of causal sequence and that he may not have had it in the corner of his eye in this case. But I conceive that his idea of cause in this instance would have included that of reason also; it would have involved an answer to the question why as well as to the question how.

of problem and solution, yet their very presence should be a warning against a not uncommon manner of speaking as though Greek tragedy were deficient somehow in dramatic action and were largely an affair of declamation and recitation.

Such an insinuation is founded only in a serious confusion. It is not unusual nowadays to talk as though a lively and bustling stage or a picturesque and striking tableau were all-sufficient evidences of dramatic quality. But if movement and stir, spectacle and panorama, were indeed dramatic, then would vaudeville be justified of its triumph. Under the circumstances it is hardly otiose to remark that for genuine drama it is hardly enough to set the characters' legs in motion; their passions must be aroused as well. It is not so much motion as emotion that makes drama. Mrs. Siddons is said to have had a way of pronouncing Lear's curse, while holding her arms rigidly at her sides, with an effect that was terrible beyond gesticulation. Only as the outward act gives rise to feeling or expresses it, does the act itself become dramatic. It is not mere action but significant action that counts. Nothing could be busier than a scene of Victor Hugo's. It is full of sound and fury, commotion and vociferation; and yet when you come to look inside for the internal drama which all this outward show and circumstance should body forth, what hollowness and vacuity you find! While as for the vaunted violences of the romantic stage, they too miss the mark as often as not. Critics have wasted their ingenuity in trying to defend the sanguinary ending of *King Lear*. In spite of the spiritual interest and importance of the murder which closes *Othello*, it is a fair

question whether Shakespeare has not overreached himself in strangling Desdemona in public. In all such cases the mind is so shaken or distracted by the physical act as to be incapable of attending to its ethical import. The impression, so far from being enhanced, is blunted by the theatrical exaggeration.

On the other hand, such a poem as Goethe's *Iphigenie* goes to the opposite extreme. Admirable as it is in its own way, it is lacking both in dramatic action and in theatrical activity. It has nobility; but it is the nobility of reflection, not of passion. No wonder that Goethe himself could never see it performed with patience. And yet tragedy, while representing passion, does not present it for its own sake. Tragedy implies an aim, an end or purpose to be accomplished—a labour, *πόνος*, an exertion. There is a fatal necessity constraining the *dramatis personae* to act and causing an interplay of motives, a fluctuation of emotion. To use the phraseology of the day, a play is not static but dynamic. It involves will, volition; it is not a mere state of feeling or even a succession of such states—but rather an agitation of spirit. Hence the necessity of a *metabasis*, as Aristotle calls it, or reverse of fortune. And it is just the point of drama that this revulsion of feeling should be capable of visible translation. Of all modern dramatists it is Shakespeare who combines most effectively this dramatic movement with theatrical activity. It is another and not the least of his many superiorities that he should so often succeed at once in setting up a genuine dramatic action in the souls of his people and in expressing so perfectly that inner revolution

by an outward and physical animation. In Racine's tragedy, perfect in its kind as it is, there is always, it must be acknowledged, a disposition to repress the latter element in accordance with the proprieties and to rely too exclusively upon recitation alone to carry the dramatic action. As a matter of fact Corneille's most admired effects are usually an affair of eloquence, even oratory.

In this respect too much altogether has been made of the so-called statuesqueness and plasticity of Greek tragedy. As long as the performance was supposed to be confined to an impossibly high and shallow stage, along which the actors were silhouetted like the figures in a bas-relief, such a conception was perhaps unavoidable. But with the orchestra as the site of the action it is no longer necessary or plausible. That Greek acting had little of the minute realism which characterizes ours, is undoubtedly true. But that it was prevailingly declamation and recitation, that it wanted stage-effect, the text of *Electra* should be sufficient to disprove, to say nothing of Aristotle's commentary. Indeed, on the strength of the devices that I have been speaking of—peripeteia, agnition, and pathos —M. Lemaître goes so far as to rebuke Aristotle for his sensationalism. Very well. But what does M. Lemaître expect? What is tragedy if it is not sensational? And while Greek acting lacked realism, there must have been a breadth, a massiveness, a gravity about it more suitable to the desperate purposes of tragedy, for that dark and sinister background, than our painstaking pastiche of common reality, of the speaking voice and the daily face.

IV

From this sort of criticism there is danger of carrying away a false and one-sided idea of the subject. In the end Greek tragedy does leave an impression of dignity, repose, and serenity, more or less suggestive, perhaps, of the epithet statuesque. But the satisfaction resides, as I have already indicated, in its treatment, not in its subject-matter. In the latter aspect it is, if anything, more terrible, monstrous, and revolting than our Elizabethan tragedy of blood. In the German *Sturm und Drang* itself there is nothing to exceed the story of the Atreides, upon which the *Oresteia* and the two *Electras* are based. The reproaches that Voltaire addressed to *Hamlet* might just as well have been addressed to the *Oedipus*. The mere repetition of such names is enough to show how elemental is the substance of Greek tragedy and how helplessly its composure depends, not upon this crude and sanguinary material, but upon the spirit with which it was animated and the ideas with which it was informed. As mere stuff, its superiority over the *Nibelungen Lied* and *Beowulf* is not great. As drama, its superiority consists in the profound moral significance with which the Greek had imbued it. And in this case the merit belongs to the race as well as the dramatist, for whose hand it was partly prepared before he touched it. It was the genius of the people which had fitted these sinister old legends for tragic treatment by deepening their content and suggestion. In themselves they are like windows opening upon a remote and savage antiquity, through which it is still possible to catch a glimpse

of wild irrational powers moving obscurely in the gloom, of the fitful workings of casualty and chance —perfidies of nature and miscarriages of reason. Consider only the labyrinth of *Oedipus* or the ambages of *Ion*.

These were the subjects that gave the Greek his opportunity. He was grappling with tremendous problems, he was struggling for a foothold on the brink of unreason, he was confronting the irresponsible demonic forces of creation, he was wrestling for the secrets of destiny. And the ground-work of his tragedy was vast, portentous, and preternatural.

And yet out of all this confusion and anarchy there seemed to be something slowly shaping—an event, an issue, a fate—directing itself more or less vaguely, in the midst of uncertainty and dread, to some far off and indistinguishable end. Careless of guilt and innocence, heedlessness and premeditation, it spared one and spoiled another indifferently; it required the child of its parents and the mother of her son; it snared alike the crafty and the unwary, the pious and the scoffer. Unprognosticable, it did not want for records: whatever came to pass, bore witness to its passage; in particular, its trail lay over certain great houses and illustrious families. Capricious as its dealings with the individual might seem, it was impossible in the long run to deny them a kind of coherence or rough and ready logic. Was it possible to go still farther: in spite of misleading appearances and occasional inconsistencies could they be reconciled on the whole with the ideal of an absolute and impartial justice?

Such was the problem which the dramatists in-

herited. In the case of Aeschylus, however, it is evident that this attempt at the moralization of fate has by no means met with perfect success. In what remains of the Promethean trilogy, which is with the *Oresteia* the most significant in this respect of all his extant work, the result looks very much like a compromise. The atmosphere of *Prometheus Bound* is, it must be confessed, a pretty uncertain medium for the conveyance of clear ideas. It is the day after the deluge, and the air is still thick and troubled. Even Aeschylus himself is shaken. It would be hard to say how much of the modern feeling of security is due to a belief in the uniformity of nature, how much to a faith in the beneficence of an over-ruling providence. The latter serves to guarantee the moral order in as far as it has not become a matter of total indifference to us, for we seem to have given up any very serious thought of the establishment of such an order in the world at large; while the former acts as a warranty for the physical order with whose ascendency we seem to have made up our minds to rest content. But however this may be and whatever their relative proportions, take away these two convictions and our world would fall to pieces. And yet Aeschylus had neither of them. He had no sense of the mechanical concatenation of nature and he had no surety for his gods. Divinity, as his religion and traditions represented it, might be poetic; it was anything but moral. In a word, it was a divinity quite in the present aesthetic taste—an artistic being without moral irrelevances, which would heartily have applauded the programme *l'art pour l'art*, but would hardly have made a reliable

guardian of manners. In default, then, of a deity to whom the regulation of such matters might safely be entrusted, Aeschylus could only fall back upon fate itself as above and beyond the gods—or else let the moral order go by the board, and with it the only law and security for existence of which he had any conception. But if Zeus' treatment of Prometheus was shocking, was it not equally shocking of fate to permit, to say nothing of ordaining, such an atrocity? What possible justice was there in condemning Prometheus to torture for his benefits to humanity in defiance of a tyrant, usurper, and parricide, whose highest title to consideration would seem to consist in the fact that he was able to command the services of Kratos and Bia?

That this question, which is obviously the question raised by the drama, is answered in a thoroughly decisive and satisfactory manner, it would be idle to maintain in the face of all the conflicting interpretations of which the play has been the subject. At the same time, I believe that, even as far as it goes, the drama does answer the question partially, and answers it in accordance with the general principles of Attic tragedy. That Aeschylus sympathized with Prometheus is pretty clear. No doubt the audience sympathized with him too. But, notwithstanding the representations of modern criticism, I venture to think that he was not to the Greek the purely sympathetic character which he has become for the modern. As far as bare intention goes, he was properly an object of pity in his distress, after the usual fashion of the tragedy in which he figured. At the same time his sacrilege, which has

lost its sting for us, must have made him for the Greeks an object of horror equally. Either so; or the feelings by which Aristotle defines the impression of his tragedy must be so indefinite and diffused as to make his statement altogether pointless —an *aperçu* rather than a definition. That Aeschylus makes no attempt to gloze his protagonist's fault, ought to be decisive. Unmistakably as he sympathizes with Prometheus, it is significant that he carefully refrains from justifying him. On the contrary, he appears on one occasion at least to have put an admission of guilt into his mouth—*ἥμαρτον, οὐκ ἀρνήσομαι*. Nor does it matter particularly how *ἥμαρτον* be translated in this connection; to err or even mistake in these matters was for the Greek, as I have pointed out, none the less a sin. In so far, then, Aeschylus keeps the idea unobscured. Prometheus suffers; but then Prometheus has violated the law for Titan as for man, and to that extent his punishment is just.

And yet, while this is true, it must be conceded in excuse of another range of interpretation that Aeschylus shows a little reluctance to *trancher* the question. It is as though the matter were not quite clear in his own mind. While he refrains from justifying Prometheus, it is equally significant that he does not exert himself to justify Zeus either. Rather he represents him as himself obnoxious to justice—wherein, to be sure, he seems to have followed his traditions. For his own part, however, he is by no means sure that the law of Zeus is a moral law; while as for his act itself he evidently regards it as abhorrent in its extremity and depicts it as an act of violence—a *πάθος* in the technically

Aristotelian sense. Hence his reserves. He will not gainsay the offense, but his heart is divided. If both are liable—for does not fate impend upon Zeus also? —then he seems to feel as though the fault of the god excused or minimized that of the Titan. There is something wrong somewhere—with the institution of Zeus, perhaps. Of one thing alone he is perfectly certain—that order is better than chaos. The rule of Zeus may be arbitrary, it may rest on force; and yet it is a rule. It may not be thoroughly equitable as yet, as an institution it may need rectification; but it is better than confusion, it is the one means to security and stabitity. He who resists and defies it, is guilty of an attempt to subvert the provisional moral government in the interests of anarchy. There is no help for it: he is an agitator, a disturber of the peace; he must be quelled.

Prometheus, then, is the revolutionary. He is the first of mutineers, and to this fact he owes his fortune as the great romantic and humanitarian symbol. He belongs to the race of dissidents, nonconformists, insurgents, or whatever name they may be called, who revolt against a necessary discipline, traditional or established, in the name of a lawless and indeterminate ideal. No wonder that he received an apotheosis in the age which promoted revolution to the rank of a political institution. He is one of that dangerous class of reformers who refuse to proceed by due process of law, who are impatient of its restraints and delays, and would suddenly take the execution of justice into their own hasty hands. Like them he obeys no higher principle than his own sympathies; he will

justify the means by the end and shelter in the day of judgment under the fairness of his intentions. He is the classical embodiment of individual justice; he does what seems good in his own eyes. That he would do right is sentimentally a mitigating circumstance; his crime is that he would do right wilfully and after his own mind. That he happens to right a wrong, to anticipate a reform, that he is the noblest of rebels, makes the demoralization of his example no less—rather the greater. Nor does it affect the issue particularly that his rebellion is directed against a tentative and imperfect administration. What administration is otherwise?

The illustration may seem far fetched; but I never read the *Prometheus* that I am not reminded of a *pensée* of Pascal's: 'It is proper to observe right; it is necessary to observe might. Right without might is powerless; might without right is tyrannical. Right without might is disputed, because there are always the wicked; might without right is reviled. It is necessary, therefore, to unite right and might, and for that purpose to make right mighty or might right.

'But right is subject to dispute; might is easily recognizable and is indisputable. Hence it is impossible to annex might to right, because might has contradicted and asserted that she alone is right. And so, since it is impossible to make right mighty, we have made might right.' Not that this conception answers exactly to Aeschylus' whole thought. What Pascal regards as a permanent state of affairs, Aeschylus contemplates as a transient condition. But Pascal's notion is true enough for the moment marked by the *Prome-*

theus Bound, 'might till right is ready'. In order that justice may be ultimately ensured, it is necessary first to found a power capable of maintaining some sort of order and discipline, from which by a process of gradual correction and improvement may be developed a more and more perfect justice, in which the rights of humanity itself shall receive their proper recognition. Such is apparently the condition on which Zeus is suffered to reign; he too must adjust himself to a higher principle than his own conveniency. For the correction and perfection, as for the maintenance, of that moral order to which the obedience of inferior beings is due, Zeus himself is answerable to the fate which palpably overhangs him throughout the tragedy. He must reconcile himself with Prometheus, he must find a *modus vivendi* with the champion of mankind, which has its rightful place also in the universal polity—before his sovereignty is confirmed. If the conclusion of the trilogy were in evidence, it is probably with this accommodation that it would deal. The first necessity, however, is to create the idea of justice and to establish it. And if Zeus is justly on probation for his management, Prometheus is no less justly in duress for rebelling, in the hot-headed old Titanic fashion, against the sole authority by which this result may be accomplished and its fruits secured. Before the advent of justice the world must be broken of Titanism.

Such, it seems to me, is the sense of the drama; and the *Oresteia* tends, I think, to confirm this conclusion. The theme is the same in both instances. In the latter case, however, where we have

the whole story, there is less danger of mistaking its purport. The only difficulty is that, just as the modern reader's impression of the *Prometheus* is falsified by a failure to feel the horror of Prometheus' sacrilege, so here his judgment of the *Oresteia* is liable to be warped inversely by an inability to feel the pity of Orestes' murderous legacy. What requires emotional correction with respect to the tragic passions at present is not the odium but the pathos of the action. There is nothing equivocal about Orestes' guilt: matricide is as abhorrent today as it ever was. But private vengeance is no longer recognized as a duty; there is nothing that is sacred, little that is sympathetic, about it. In the mind of the Greeks, however, who appreciated the obligation of the latter as fully as the abomination of the former, the situation inspired the usual tragic duplicity of feeling. They were of a temper to be touched by the dutifulness of Agamemnon's avenger and to be horrified at the impiety of Clytemnestra's executioner. Otherwise, I am at a loss to account for my sentiment in reading the trilogy; for I must confess that my wishes are for the success of Orestes and his sister, much as I may reprobate the deed by which it is assured. Nor is this the sentiment of the situation as such; it is not in the *Electra* of Euripides. The Aeschylean Orestes, though a criminal in act, is no epileptic monster like the Euripidean: albeit he does not lend himself so readily to humanitarian attitudinizing, there is as much to be said for him as for Prometheus. And, curiously enough, it is Euripides who finally says it, though not much to his advantage, in vilifying Apollo as the instigator of his crime. As for Aeschy-

lus, however, he accuses Apollo no more than he does Zeus—for one thing which romantic criticism has overlooked is the fact that if Zeus is to blame for Prometheus' plight, Apollo is equally to blame for Orestes' and with less excuse because without provocation. At best the circumstances are different, the responsibility is the same. It is fair, therefore, to argue that Aeschylus' idea must have been alike in both cases. But if anything is clear, it is that the author of the *Oresteia* is no romanticist; he is not disintegrating the moral edifice but cementing it; he is not relaxing discipline but tightening it. It is not at Apollo's expense that he claims the audience's pity for Orestes, whose saving virtue, as compared with Prometheus, is his submission to authority. What is impossible and intolerable in his situation is the fault of an imperfect and makeshift institution, the *lex talionis*, whose whole enormity is finally demonstrated in the fatal dilemma of this last sad inheritor of a bloody old tradition. The impulsive movements of private retaliation must give way to the deliberate decisions of an impartial and dispassionate court. And though it would be an insult to justice were the perpetrator of what is after all a monstrous crime, allowed to go scot free, yet it is only equity that he whose sufferings have been the occasion of reform, should benefit by the amendment to whose adoption he has at least contributed.

In these pieces at which I have glanced as those most critically interested in the method and conception of Attic tragedy, Aeschylus is concerned mainly for the reconciliation of might and right through the medium of divine legislation—what we

should call nowadays in secular terms the evolution of justice. The subject corresponds with his place in the history of tragic ideas and responds to the conscious craving for a definite moral constitution. His problem is one of institutional morality—if such a phrase is permissible in such a connection; its solution is an affair of moral statesmanship and administration. Personally I do not believe that a more tremendous tragedy than *Agamemnon* has ever been written: I do not know of any tragic impression more awe-inspiring than that produced by Cassandra arrested by the spirit of prophecy at the door of the Atreides' palace. For this reason I hesitate to call the problems of private morality deeper and necessarily more tragic, after the current manner of speaking. But at all events they are different; and it is these problems, raised by spontaneous impulses and by promptings of conscience hopelessly at odds with the determinations of life and society, which are Sophocles' peculiarly.

In *Prometheus* and the *Oresteia* the tragic schism is wholly external; it is due to a maladjustment which may be corrected without permanent harm to the persons involved. But every anomaly felt as tragic is not to be explained or reconciled so happily. There are instances in which it is inherent and fatal; in which it involves an organic lesion. It is so with Oedipus; not only is his crime his own, but the responsibility is his also. Unlike the Aeschylean Orestes he acts by and for himself and at his own peril. To be sure, it may be said that like Prometheus he acts in behalf of others and in the interests of the general, whether or not by prescription. But there is a difference. It is not without

intention that Sophocles has centered the drama, not upon that portion of his protagonist's career which has been mazed and darkened by celestial counsels, but rather upon that portion in which he, the child of fate—*παῖς τύχης*, as he calls himself with cruelly unconscious irony—has the temerity to act by his own lights with infatuate confidence in the clarity of his own vision—he, the puppet of destiny, blindfold from birth, who has never taken a step with a full sense of the conditions and consequences of his action. It is this pretender to clairvoyance, this dabbler in enigmas, the reader of the riddling Sphinx whom Sophocles represents as pretending lightheartedly to unravel the mystery of his own being. He is a great criminal, to be sure; but he has become so inadvertently and as a result of such a skein of fatality that it is doubtful whether his lot would not be wholly pitiful (as, indeed, many have found it, *le grand Corneille* among them, who have failed to attend strictly to the action) if it were not for the pertinacity with which he is seen to pursue destruction in insensate conceit of his own sufficiency. And to the same effect the length of time which is supposed to have elapsed since his crimes—so long have they lain concealed that they would seem entitled to a measure of immunity, as by a kind of unwritten statute of limitations, were it not for the fact that he himself is the one who finally unearths them. Had he been brought to account by another, it would have appeared little better than a divine inequity. I do not believe that any one can read the tragedy intelligently without being sensible of presumption, of gross moral impropriety in the bias whereby Oedipus is impelled

to seek for himself the solution of his own problematic existence. It is no correction of institutions that will mend his case—nothing but a reformation of the entire character.

With all this I am puzzled to understand why the *Oedipus* has never received the same sort of philosophical rating as the *Prometheus*. Its significance is, if anything, more profound and is certainly much more general. It is the very type of life universal. While lending itself with equal readiness to 'symbolic' interpretation, it has never been surpassed as a figure of human responsibility in particular. We are all of us without exception in Oedipus' case —rounded like him with ignorance and mystery, and yet obliged to act incessantly and at our own hazard, so that our every step seems a presumption deserving of disaster and our every judgment an arrogance inviting rebuke and humiliation. Of all Greek tragedy the *Oedipus Tyrannus* seems to me not only the most characteristic of the genius which produced it, but also most applicable to our hapless human lot.

At the same time, I must confess to a particular affection for the *Electra*. Perhaps it is the situations that especially please me—Orestes at the gate of the palace overhearing his sister's lamentation; Electra herself with the funeral urn in her hands; the recognition with its sudden revulsion of feeling. In the face of the impending abomination there is something singularly affecting in the attachment of these two ill-starred children of a murdered father —the dependence of the one, the assurance of the other. But however this may be, the important matter for the inherence of Sophoclean tragedy is

the shift of the traditional center of interest from Orestes himself to his sister. However it may be with him, she at least is under no divine compulsion. Her only abettor is her conscience. She acts of her own accord and by the exigency of her own nature.

But after all the clearest illustration of Sophocles' conception of the tragic as something intimate and essential is to be found in neither of these pieces but in the *Antigone*. Ethic I was about to call it. And for that matter what is the source of tragedy in the *Antigone* but the collision of an ethic with a moral principle—of the fatal propensities of character with the prescriptions of social or civil expediency or necessity? It is the usual Sophoclean theme, the theme of *Oedipus* and *Electra*; but it comes out here more distinctly than elsewhere on account of what appears to us the superior sanctity of the former, the individual principle—or rather, probably, on account of the comparative insignificance of the latter. And yet in view of the Greek's devotion to his city—a devotion for which, narrow, shortsighted, and suicidal though we esteem it, he showed himself willing again and again to sacrifice every advantage and undergo every hardship—I cannot make so light of Antigone's contempt of what to her countrymen was patriotism as do many critics for whose opinions I usually feel the greatest deference. What else was her conduct in Greek eyes than treasonable? And little as we are at a point of view to appreciate this sentiment (though this is by no means the only instance on record of sectional or parochial animosity or of the obloquy incurred by non-adherents of local or party politics) I still believe that Antigone's disloyalty to the

polity—or what was bound to seem such in the heat of a great public excitement—must have been a scandal to a Greek audience, which was, on the other hand, in no less favourable disposition of spirit, in comparison with us, to sympathize with her religious scruples as distinct from the purely personal pathos of her condition and being. And so it is, I believe, that Sophocles intended her to appear—like other tragic protagonists, as an object of horror no less than of pity; otherwise, there would be something gratuitous in the extraordinary severity which characterizes his chief magistrate, by her attitude to whom, as the representative of the government, Antigone's faithlessness to the commonwealth is dramatically measured. To be sure, such asperity is natural enough to a person or a people in the reaction succeeding immediately upon a tremendous crisis. But if that were all, if the point were merely psychological, Sophocles would hardly have been so careful to restore the equilibrium by meting out a final judgment to Creon for exceeding the just measure. There is no doubt, it seems to me, about his intention; he will not countenance contempt of the supreme impersonal law on the part of an individual whatever his or her title on other grounds to admiration or respect; for 'value dwells not in particular will'.

But at the same time, while *Antigone* fits the framework of its *genre* and is no exception to the general definition of Greek tragedy, I am well aware that for us to-day, whose ideas of religious and civic duty are so different, such an interpretation must seem far-fetched and forced. Indeed, there is no tragedy, I fancy, even of the Greeks, with respect

to whose moral bases we are at such a disadvantage. The burial motive is as remote from our instinct as the cult of the city; we are as unfitted to respond to the one as to the other. It is the person of the herione almost exclusively that appeals to us. Elementally, she is not the representative of any special duty or set of duties—though if she were not sustained by a sense of duty, she would not be the noble and touching figure she is. For our emotions it is not the mere political and social crux which makes the play—this is but the vehicle; it is the case of conscience. What renders the tragedy peculiarly affecting among the tragedies of Sophocles, what gives it its specific flavour is not merely the bare dilemma—the consciousness of rectitude which can neither surrender its convictions without shame nor persist in them without ruin—but the nature of the protagonist: her sex and youth, her ill-omened birth, and her attachment to the son of her executioner. No wonder that she has become for the modern one of the great sympathetic characters of literature, like Cordelia, and her tragedy a sentimental one.

On the other hand, while Sophocles holds the scales even—while he gives the ethical and the moral elements alike their due—to the heroine's womanliness its meed of compassionate admiration as to the tyrant's arrogance its fitting correction, at the same time that he asserts the existence of a higher authority than the judgment of particulars—yet for all this, which escapes us more or less but was clear enough to the Greeks, I would not assert that he himself had in mind any such fleshless formula as that which I have applied to his work.

All I mean, is that he conceived in a certain way and to a certain effect, which I have tried to analyse —roughly and bunglingly enough, I dare say. No doubt he worked by touch, not by measure. He was not likely to stop to anatomize an effective subject if it yielded the proper emotions on inspection. But that in spite of the modern perplexity of its theme and the spontaneity of its creation the *Antigone* does take down regularly, I have tried to show. Generically and schematically it is, like the other works of its author, the tragedy of the individual will.

In general terms, it is from the same source, the conflict of the ethic with the moral, that Euripides derives his drama. But unlike his predecessors he fails to sustain the supremacy or even the importance of the latter principle, and failing to do so, misses the distinctive double note of Greek tragedy. His favourite procedure is to represent morality as a hollow convention or tradition with little or no title to reverence or credit. As a result his characters are either interesting sinners like Medea and Phaedra or superstitious bigots and credulous gulls like Orestes and Menelaus. They are seldom or never actuated by conscience or conviction, a sense of duty or obligation, but impulse or appetite, desire or caprice. Like Racine's heroes and heroines, they are creatures of passion, not of resolution—they suffer their destiny rather than incur it. Of the same order too are the motives of his divinities like the Aphrodite in *Hippolytus* or the Apollo in *Ion*.

Particularly *Ion*—what can be said of its purport? What system can possibly make moral sense of such a skein of divine knavery and deceit? In

these respects the play is so illustrative of the Euripidean skepsis as to merit a brief analysis. If the prologue as spoken by Hermes contains the data of the piece—and I can see no justification on this occasion for traversing Euripides' usual practice—then, we must take it for settled that Ion is the son of Apollo and Creusa.[1] After an indefinite interval of neglect, during which Creusa has married Xuthus, and her child, miraculously rescued from exposure and carried to Delphi, has been brought up in the service of the temple, Phoebus, desirous at last of establishing his son advantageously, plots to fob off the youth upon Xuthus as an illegimate son of the latter. This fraud he has no great difficulty in perpetrating with the aid of his oracle, assisted to some extent by Xuthus' credulity. The scheme is in a fair way to succeed but for Creusa's ignorance of the boy's identity. And this is a weak joint in the structure of the drama; for it would seem natural that Phoebus should contrive some means of advising Creusa beforehand of his amiable intentions. As a matter of fact, however, Creusa, revolted by her husband's attempt to smuggle his supposititious child into the family, conspires with her servant against Ion's life but to such ill effect that she is in imminent danger of losing her own. In the pinch there seems no way of saving her but to declare the truth. Hence the production by the priestess of the cradle and the so-called 'proofs'. However it may be with the cold-blooded critic, this evidence is sufficient to convince Creusa that Ion, the youth whom she has plotted to kill, is

[1] But compare the interesting introduction to Verrall's edition of the play, to which I am not a little indebted.

indeed her child; while for the audience the evidence is confirmed, we must believe, by the testimony of Athena, who by way of saving Apollo's face, appears as the *dea ex machina*, in Euripides' habitual manner, to close the play. The piece terminates, then, with the triumphal accomplishment of the celestial rascality. Xuthus has already been brought to acknowlege the boy as the fruit of his own amour; and now Creusa accepts him for her part by a similar motive, though on better grounds. The principals are in accord; and Ion's fortune is assured. As to the possibility that Xuthus may learn of the deception on some future occasion, that contingency lies without the boundaries of the play and need not be discussed.

Upon the ethics of the characters, divine and human, concerned in this travesty of providence, comment is superfluous. They are all unscrupulous equally. If anything, indignation sways slightly to the advantage of Xuthus as the party actually abused. Nevertheless he himself is quite unable to appear in court with clean hands. The only case deserving of commiseration is Ion's. He has no first-hand information of any sort concerning his birth or the manner of it; he knows only the two contradictory accounts of his parentage—the one sponsored by the oracle to the effect that his father is Xuthus, the other by Athena to the effect that his father is Apollo and his mother Creusa. It is all very well for the audience to credit the latter report; they have a confidential source of information in the prologue. It is very well for Creusa too to do so, if she will; she knows the circumstances of her son's birth and exposure. It is very well even for

Xuthus to think as he does at his own peril; he knows at least his past and its opportunities. For all of these parties to the transaction there is some possibility of comfort in their faith. But what can be the state of Ion's mind? Obviously, one of the divine communications must be a lie—either the oracle of Apollo or the messenger of Apollo is false. And if one is false, which? And if either is false, what is the security for the other? Why not both, then, since they speak for the same principal? And in that case, how about the priestess with her cradle and her 'proofs'? Ion may like to take his mother's word. But faith and security are dead forever. From the happy, confident and confiding ministrant of the god, serving the temple and scattering the intrusions of the birds with playful threats and mimic violence, he is doomed logically to an anxious and troubled future; and he passes sullenly into the great doubt that has been prepared for him. Such is the characteristic moral ambiguity or obliquity of the Euripidean *dénouement*.

And the illustration is a fair one. As Euripides' tragedy is destitute of a principle of any kind it has no minatory or exemplary force to speak of. If it is moral at all, it is so, not in the Aeschylean or Sophoclean, but in the modern, the humanitarian, manner. In this one sense, since his drama—with the exception of a few artless and appealing but hardly tragic figures, like Ion, who are usually the dupes or victims of the plausible and unscrupulous knaves about them—since his drama is a marvellous illustration of the vices, frailties, and weaknesses, the 'humanity' of mortals, its author is not

undeserving of the epithet with which he has been graced by a late romantic admirer, 'Euripides the human'—an attribution with whose sentiment a majority of Athenian critics would probably have concurred.

In these respects Euripides is not very unlike Ibsen. Like the latter he too is unmistakably decadent and obsessed by the nightmare of ugliness. It is not so much, perhaps, that he dotes upon the sordid, the base, and the malodorous—though at times he displays no little complacency in their depiction—as that they haunt and fascinate him; they block up his view till he can see little or nothing else. As far as he is concerned, the heroic has ceased to exist; Helen is a baggage, Agamemnon a politician, Menelaus a cuckold, Ulysses a trickster, Orestes an epileptic. For the tragic emotion of horror he substitutes disgust; for the moral qualm of his predecessors a shrinking of the flesh, a sense of physical repugnance and nausea. His most distinctive dramatic effect results from a certain uncanniness of character and motive. He is temperamentally ambiguous, equivocal, evasive, shifty. He is prone to blink the issue, to refuse to look the tragic fact square in the face. His instinct is to deny it, if possible, to juggle it away by some trick of theatrical legerdemain; at all events to deprive it of moral relevance and competency.

It is evident, for instance, that he can see no sense, no reason of any kind in the sacrifice of Iphigenia. It is merely odious to him as it was to Racine centuries later. And yet what becomes of the tragedy without it? There is no apparent violation of justice, nothing to raise a doubt or

suggest a suspicion; there is no qualm, no agony of question, no mystery at once terrible and revelatory. It is all perfectly simple, open, and morally intelligible. The interest centers exclusively upon the *dramatis personae* and their conflicting emotions. It is distinctively a modern, a psychological play. As contrasted with the Aeschylean and Sophoclean tragedy of principle, it is concerned solely with character and its expression.

In the *Electra*, on the other hand, the absence of a clear moral issue has resulted in what is mainly a drama of incident. Orestes is nothing more or less than a monster for his pains, Apollo a scoundrel for instigating him to an unnatural murder; that is all there is to it. Aside from the morbid psychology incidental to the situation attention has nothing to perch upon except the stratagem and imposture by which Aegisthus and Clytemnestra are disposed of. The tragic problem has vanished completely; there is nothing left but a particularly harrowing and truculent melodrama.

As a result of his inability to make anything out of his fables and his impatience with the interpretations of others, Euripides is reduced, in the article of theme, to the secondary *rôle* of critic. This is his fundamental weakness as a playwright. It shows itself in the loose construction, the faulty economy, the feeble effect of his individual dramas taken each as a whole, to say nothing of his faultfinding digressions on the management of his predecessors. In particular, since he sees no sense in his action as such and has no inkling of its final cause or rationale, it is only with the greatest difficulty that he can bring a play to a close at all—only by some conventional or

arbitrary expedient, a dramatic *cliché* or theatrical miracle. As a matter of fact, his pieces seldom conclude; they terminate. Hence his abuse of the *deus ex machina*, which in contradicting or interrupting the logic of events, is to all intents and purposes a nullity, as in *Iphigenia at Aulis*, or else is effective only in dispelling the illusion, as in *Orestes*.

The effect of all this activity was inevitably to discredit and invalidate the value of the symbols with which Euripides himself was obliged to work. In transforming in this way the old mythology into a new psychology, his treatment of his matter resulted in dissolving its moral ideas and in emptying it of its moral content. But inasmuch as he had nothing else to build upon, he virtually knocked the ground from under his own feet and was obliged to search his materials for other means of defraying the expenses of a public performance. It is for this reason that in turning his attention from the sense of the transaction as a whole, he comes to make so much of its constituent moments. Unable to comprehend the ebb and flow of the tides, he can only admire the ebulliency and agitation of their surface. In this manner he becomes the dramatist of passion. This is his merit and distinction. For this kind of thing he was eminently fitted. Before he created them, such figures as Phaedra and Medea had never been dreamed of; and in some respects they have never been surpassed from that day to this. And yet this limitation—for limitation it is to see nothing but the passions to which an action gives rise and to miss its moral import as a whole—results in laying the principal dramatic stress upon sentiment; it makes the pathetic the sole effect of tragedy.

Even in the *Hippolytus*, which comes closest to the standard of his predecessors, the interest centers in the hero's character even more than in his behaviour. In a way it is almost a temperamental problem which is propounded—and solved—in the sense of Greek virtue. But the fact that it is solved at all, is the important matter in this connection, since it is the solution that gives tragedy its moral significance. Hippolytus is responsible for his own predicament. Attractive as his youthful person may be and praiseworthy as is his attachment to Artemis in itself, he is still the victim of his own immoderation. Nevertheless, there is a modern tinge to the story. Hippolytus is an appealing, a 'sympathetic' hero in a manner in which neither Agamemnon nor Oedipus nor Orestes nor any of his predecessors, with the possible exception of Antigone and Prometheus, were appealing. Further, the duty that he follows is but his own inclination in disguise. So warmly has he made himself a party to the traditional feud between the two goddesses that he can not refrain from taunting Aphrodite as a fly-by-night. Nor is Artemis' threat to have her revenge on Aphrodite at some future time by the slaying of Adonis or otherwise, particularly reassuring for the permanent establishment of righteousness.

> *Ἐγὼ γὰρ αὖθις ἄλλον ἐξ ἐμῆς χερὸς*
> *ὃς ἂν μάλιστ' οἱ φίλτατος κυρῇ βροτῶν*
> *τόξοις ἀφύκτοις τοῖσδε τιμωρήσομαι.*

Indeed, there is in the play not a little of the divine wantonness for which its author was in the habit of disparaging his deities. It too is marked by the Euripidean rictus.

And the *Bacchae*, if it is anything like Euripides'

last word, only confirms, with something of the solemnity of a testament, the melancholy story which the *Hippolytus* would appear to have interrupted but half-heartedly and for a moment. If the play has any sense, it can mean nothing but a divorce between divinity and justice, which Aeschylus and Sophocles had done their best to reconcile. It is nothing short of a repudiation of an overruling providence. The gods are gods, he seems to say, they do as they list; there is but scant virtue in them. In short, as I, Euripides, have always contended, the order of the universe is not moral but emotional. Such is, to be sure, Euripides' one wailing refrain; but in the *Bacchae* he seems at last to acquiesce, and not without complacency in a conscienceless fatality.

It is so that Euripides, the most imitated as the most consonant of classic dramatists with later tastes, serves as a kind of transition between the serious drama of ancient and modern times. In his case interest had already begun to shift from moral to psychological problems, from the quality of actions to the characters of men and the activities of nature. It is as though he had undertaken to forecast the terminals toward which the modern drama would move in its evolution, even to the amorphous and indiscriminate *drame* into which tragedy proper has finally degenerated, not to speak of the Shakespearean tragedy of character, which he may have influenced in a measure through Seneca, and the Racinean tragedy of passion of which he was obviously the direct and immediate inspiration, while the deformation of his tragedy as a *genre* was evidently in the direction of late or modern comedy.

J. E. SPINGARN

1875–

THE NEW CRITICISM[1] (1910)

'WHAT droll creatures these college professors are whenever they talk about art,' wrote Flaubert in one of his letters, and voiced the world's opinion of academic criticism. For the world shares the view of the Italian poet that 'monks and professors cannot write the lives of poets', and looks only to those rich in literary experience for its opinions on literature. But the poets themselves have had no special grudge against academic criticism that they have not felt equally for every other kind. For the most part, they have objected to all criticism, since what each mainly seeks in his own case is not criticism, but uncritical praise. 'Kill the dog, he is a reviewer,' cried the young Goethe; and in an age nearer our own William Morris expressed his contempt for those who earn a livelihood by writing their opinions of the works of others. Fortunately for Criticism, it does not live by the grace of poets, to whom it can be of small service at its best, but by the grace of others who have neither the poet's genius nor the critic's insight. I hope to persuade you this evening that the poets have been mistaken in their very conception of the critic's craft, which lives by a power that poets and critics share together. The secret of this power has come to men slowly, and the knowledge they have gained by it has

[1] Reprinted from *Criticism in America: Its Function and Status* with the kind permission of Harcourt, Brace & Co.

transformed their idea of Criticism. What this secret is, and into what new paths Criticism is being led by it, is the subject of my lecture to-night.

I

At the end of the last century, France once more occupied the center of that stage whose auditors are the inheritors of European civilization. Once more all the world listened while she talked and played, and some of the most brilliant of her talk was now on the question of the authority of Criticism. It is not my purpose to tell you (what you know already) with what sober and vigorous learning the official critics of the *Revue des deux Mondes* espoused the cause of old gods with the new weapons of science, and with what charm and tact, with what grace and suppleness of thought, Jules Lemaître and Anatole France, to mention no others, defended the free play of the appreciative mind. Some of the sparks that were beaten out on the anvil of controversy have become fixed stars, the classical utterances of Criticism, as when Anatole France described the critic not as a judge imposing sentence, but as a sensitive soul detailing his 'adventures among masterpieces'.

To have sensations in the presence of a work of art and to express them, that is the function of Criticism for the impressionistic critic. His attitude he would express somewhat in this fashion: 'Here is a beautiful poem, let us say Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*. To read it is for me to experience a thrill of pleasure. My delight in it is itself a judgment, and what better judgment is it possible for me to give? All that I can do is to tell how it affects me,

what sensations it gives me. Other men will derive other sensations from it, and express them differently; they too have the same right as I. Each of us, if we are sensitive to impressions and express ourselves well, will produce a new work of art to replace the work which gave us our sensations. That is the art of Criticism, and beyond that Criticism cannot go.'

We shall not begrudge this exquisite soul the pleasure of his sensations or his cult of them, nor would he be disconcerted if we were to point out that the interest has been shifted from the work of art to his own impressions. Let us suppose that you say to him: 'We are not interested in you, but in *Prometheus Unbound*. To describe the state of your health is not to help us to understand or to enjoy the poem. Your criticism constantly tends to get away from the work of art, and to center attention on yourself and your feelings.'

But his answer would not be difficult to find: 'What you say is true enough. My criticism tends to get farther and farther from the work of art and to cast a light upon myself; but all criticism tends to get away from the work of art and to substitute something in its place. The impressionist substitutes himself, but what other form of criticism gets closer to *Prometheus Unbound*? Historical criticism takes us away from it in a search of the environment, the age, the race, the poetic school of the artist; it tells us to read the history of the French Revolution, Godwin's *Political Justice*, the *Prometheus Bound* of Aeschylus, and Calderón's *Mágico Prodigioso*. Psychological criticism takes me away from the poem, and sets me to work on the bio-

graphy of the poet; I wish to enjoy *Prometheus Unbound*, and instead I am asked to become acquainted with Shelley the man. Dogmatic criticism does not get any closer to the work of art by testing it according to rules and standards; it sends me to the Greek dramatists, to Shakespeare, to Aristotle's *Poetics*, possibly to Darwin's *Origin of Species*, in order that I may see how far Shelley has failed to give dramatic reality to his poem, or has failed to observe the rules of his *genre*; but that means the study of other works, and not of *Prometheus Unbound*. Aesthetics takes me still farther afield into speculations on art and beauty. And so it is with every form of Criticism. Do not deceive yourself. All criticism tends to shift the interest from the work of art to something else. The other critics give us history, politics, biography, erudition, metaphysics. As for me, I re-dream the poet's dream, and if I seem to write lightly, it is because I have awakened, and smile to think I have mistaken a dream for reality. I at least strive to replace one work of art by another, and art can only find its *alter ego* in art.'

It would be idle to detail the arguments with which the advocates of the opposing forms of Criticism answered these questionings. Literary erudition and evolutionary science were the chief weapons used to fight this modern heresy, but the one is an unwieldly and the other a useless weapon in the field of aesthetic thought. On some sides, at least, the position of the impressionists was impregnable; but two points of attack were open to their opponents. They could combat the notion that taste is a substitute for learning, or learning a

substitute for taste, since both are vital for Criticism; and they could maintain that the relativity of taste does not in any sense affect its authority. In this sense impressionistic Criticism erred only less grievously than the 'judicial' Criticism which opposed it. Each in its own way was inadequate and incomplete.

But these arguments are not my present concern; what I wish to point out is that the objective and dogmatic forms of Criticism were fighting no new battle against impressionistic Criticism in that decade of controversy. It was a battle as old as the earliest reflection on the subject of poetry, if not as old as the sensitiveness of poets. Modern literature begins with the same doubts, with the same quarrel. In the sixteenth century the Italians were formulating that classical code which imposed itself on Europe for two centuries, and which, even in our generation, Brunetière has merely disguised under the trappings of natural science. They evolved the dramatic unities, and all those rules which the poet Pope imagined to be 'Nature still but Nature methodized'. But at the very moment when their spokesman Scaliger was saying that 'Aristotle is our emperor, the perpetual dictator of all the fine arts', another Italian, Pietro Aretino, was insisting that there is no rule except the whim of genius and no standard of judgment beyond individual taste.

The Italians passed on the torch to the French of the seventeenth century, and from that day to this the struggle between the two schools has never ceased to agitate the progress of Criticism in France. Boileau against Saint-Evremond, Classicists against Romanticists, dogmatists against impressionists,—

the antinomy is deep in the French nature, indeed in the nature of Criticism itself. Listen to this: 'It is not for the purpose of deciding on the merit of this noble poet [Vergil], nor of harming his reputation, that I have spoken so freely concerning him. The world will continue to think what it does of his beautiful verses; and as for me, I judge nothing, I only say what I think, and what effect each of these things produces on my heart and mind.' Surely these words are from the lips of Lemaître himself! 'I judge nothing; I only say what I feel.' But no, these are the utterances of the Chevalier de Méré, a wit of the age of Louis XIV, and he is writing to the secretary of that stronghold of authority, the French Academy. For some men, even in the age of Boileau, Criticism was nothing but an 'adventure among masterpieces'.

No, it is no new battle; it is the perpetual conflict of Criticism. In every age impressionism (or enjoyment) and dogmatism (or judgment) have grappled with one another. They are the two sexes of Criticism; and to say that they flourish in every age is to say that every age has its masculine as well as its feminine criticism,—the masculine criticism that may or may not force its own standards on literature, but that never at all events is dominated by the object of its studies; and the feminine criticism that responds to the lure of art with a kind of passive ecstasy. In the age of Boileau it was the masculine type which gave the tone to Criticism; in our own, outside of the universities, it has certainly been the feminine. But they continue to exist side by side, ever falling short of their highest powers, unless mystically mated,—judgment erect-

ing its edicts into arbitrary standards and conventions, enjoyment lost in the mazes of its sensuous indecision.

Yet if we examine these opposing forms of Criticism in our own age, we shall find, I think, that they are not wholly without a common ground to meet on; that, in fact, they are united in at least one prepossession which they do not share with the varying forms of Criticism in any of the earlier periods of its history. The Greeks conceived of literature, not as an inevitable expression of creative power, but as a reasoned 'imitation' or re-shaping of the materials of life; for Aristotle, poetry is the result of man's imitative instinct, and differs from history and science in that it deals with the probable or possible rather than with the real. The Romans conceived of literature as a noble art, intended (though under the guise of pleasure) to inspire men with high ideals of life. The classicists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries accepted this view in the main; for them, literature was a kind of exercise,—a craft acquired by study of the classics, and guided in the interpretation of nature by the traditions of Greek and Roman art. For these men literature was as much a product of reason as science or history. The eighteenth century complicated the course of Criticism by the introduction of vague and novel criteria, such as 'imagination', 'sentiment', and 'taste', yet it was only in part able to liberate itself from the older tradition.

But with the Romantic Movement there developed the new idea which coördinates all Criticism in the nineteenth century. Very early in the century, Mme. de Staël and others formulated the idea that

literature is an 'expression of society'—a phrase that is merely a half-truth if 'society' is interpreted in terms of the narrow circle of the individual poet's life instead of in terms of the society which is commensurate with the spirit of man. Victor Cousin enunciated 'the fundamental rule, that expression is the supreme law of art', and, as the meaning of expression was gradually misunderstood and narrowed, became the unwitting parent of the mechanical theories of the French school of 'art for art's sake'. Later, Sainte-Beuve developed and illustrated his theory that literature is an expression of personality—another misleading half-truth, if by personality is meant, not the artistic personality which unfolds itself in the work of art, but the complex of external traits which the artist exhibits in his practical life. Still later, under the influence of natural science, Taine took a hint from Hegel and elaborated the idea that literature is an expression of race, age, and environment. The extreme impressionists prefer to think of art as the exquisite expression of delicate and fluctuating sensations or impressions of life. But for all these critics and theorists, literature is an expression of something, of experience or emotion, of the external or internal, of the man himself or something outside the man; yet it is always conceived of as an art of expression. The objective, the dogmatic, the impressionistic critics of our day may set for themselves very different tasks, but the idea of expression is implicit in all they write.

French criticism has been leaning heavily on the idea of expression for a century or more, but no attempt has been made in France to understand its

aesthetic content, except for a few vague echoes of German thought. For the first to give philosophic precision to the theory of expression, and to found a method of Criticism based upon it, were the Germans of the age that stretches from Herder to Hegel. All the forces of philosophical thought were focused on this central concept, while the critics enriched themselves from out this golden store. I suppose you all remember the famous passage in which Carlyle describes the achievement of German criticism in that age. 'Criticism', says Carlyle, 'has assumed a new form in Germany. It proceeds on other principles and proposes to itself a higher aim. The main is not now a question concerning the qualities of diction, the coherence of metaphors, the fitness of sentiments, the general logical truth in a work of art, as it was some half century ago among most critics, neither is it a question mainly of a psychological sort to be answered by discovering and delineating the peculiar nature of the poet from his poetry, as is usual with the best of our own critics at present; but it is, not indeed exclusively, but inclusively, of its two other questions, properly and ultimately a question of the essence and peculiar life of the poetry itself. . . . The problem is not now to determine by what mechanism Addison composed sentences and struck out similitudes, but by what far finer and more mysterious mechanism Shakespeare organized his dramas and gave life and individuality to his Ariel and his Hamlet. Wherein lies that life; how have they attained that shape and individuality? Whence comes that empyrean fire which irradiates their whole being, and pierces, at least in starry gleams, like a diviner thing, into

all hearts? Are these dramas of his not verisimilar only, but true; nay, truer than reality itself, since the essence of unmixed reality is bodied forth in them under more expressive similes? What is this unity of pleasures; and can our deeper inspection discern it to be indivisible and existing by necessity because each work springs as it were from the general elements of thought and grows up therefrom into form and expansion by its own growth? Not only who was the poet and how did he compose, but what and how was the poem, and why was it a poem and not rimed eloquence, creation and not figured passion? These are the questions for the critic. Criticism stands like an interpreter between the inspired and the uninspired; between the prophet and those who hear the melody of his words, and catch some glimpse of their material meaning, but understand not their deeper import.'

I am afraid that no German critic wholly realized this ideal; but it was at least the achievement of the Germans that they enunciated the doctrine, even if they did not always adequately illustrate it in practice. It was they who first realized that art has performed its function when it has expressed itself; it was they who first conceived of Criticism as the study of expression. 'There is a destructive and a creative or constructive criticism,' said Goethe; the first measures and tests literature according to mechanical standards, the second answers the fundamental questions: 'What has the writer proposed to himself to do? and how far has he succeeded in carrying out his own plan?' Carlyle, in his essay on Goethe, almost uses Goethe's own words, when he says that the critic's first and foremost duty is to

make plain to himself 'what the poet's aim really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his eye, and how far, with such materials as were afforded to him, he has fulfilled it'.

This has been the central problem, the guiding star, of all modern criticism. From Coleridge to Pater, from Sainte-Beuve to Lemaître, this is what the critics have been striving for, even when they have not succeeded; yes, even when they have been deceiving themselves into thinking that they were striving for something else. This was not the ideal of the critics of Aristotle's day, who, like so many of their successors, censured a work of art as 'irrational, impossible, morally hurtful, self-contradictory, or contrary to technical correctness'. This was not Boileau's standard when he blamed Tasso for the introduction of Christian rather than pagan mythology into epic poetry; nor Addison's, when he tested *Paradise Lost* according to the rules of Le Bossu; nor Dr. Johnson's, when he lamented the absence of poetic justice in *King Lear*, or pronounced dogmatically that the poet should not 'number the streaks of the tulip'. What has the poet tried to do, and how has he fulfilled his intention? What is he striving to express and how has he expressed it? What vital and essential spirit animates his work, what central impression does it leave on the receptive mind, and how can I best express this impression? Is his work true to the laws of its own being rather than to laws formulated by others? These are the questions that modern critics have been taught to ask when face to face with the work of a poet. Only one *caveat* must be borne in mind when attempting to answer them; the poet's aim must

be judged at the moment of the creative act, that is to say, by the art of the poem itself, and not by the vague ambitions which he imagines to be his real intentions before or after the creative act is achieved. For to create a work of art is the goal of every artist; and all questions in regard to his achievement resolve themselves into this: Has he or has he not created a work of art?

II

The theory of expression, the concept of literature as an art of expression, is the common ground on which critics have met for a century or more. Yet how many absurdities, how many complicated systems, how many confusions have been superimposed on this fundamental idea; and how slowly has its full significance become the possession of critics! To accept the naked principle is to play havoc with these confusions and complications; and no one has seen this more clearly, or driven home its inevitable consequences with more intelligence and vigor, than an Italian thinker and critic of our own day, Benedetto Croce, who has been gaining ground in the English-speaking world from the day when Mr. Balfour several years ago gave him a kind of official introduction in his Romanes Lecture. But I for one needed no introduction to his work; under his banner I enrolled myself long ago, and here reënroll myself in what I now say. He has led aesthetic thought inevitably from the concept that art is expression to the conclusion that all expression is art. Time does not permit, nor reason ask, that we should follow this argument through all its *pros* and *cons*. If this

theory of expression be once and for all accepted, as indeed it has been partly though confusedly accepted by all modern critics, the ground of Criticism is cleared of its dead lumber and its weeds. I propose now merely to point out this dead lumber and these weeds. In other words, we shall see to what conclusions the critical thought and practice of a century have been inevitably converging, and what elements of the old Criticism and the old literary history are disappearing from the new.

In the first place, we have done with all the old Rules. The very conception of 'rules' harks back to an age of magic, and reminds the modern of those mysterious words which the heroes of the fairy-tales are without reason forbidden to utter; the rules are a survival of the savage *taboo*. We find few arbitrary rules in Aristotle, who limited himself to empirical inductions from the experience of literature; but they appear in the later Greek rhetoricians; and in the Romans, empirical induction has been hardened into dogma. Horace lays down the law to the prospective playwright in this manner: 'You must never have more than three actors on the stage at any one time; you must never let your drama have more or less than five acts.' It is unnecessary to trace the history of these rules, or to indicate how they increased in number, how they were arranged into a system by the classicists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and how they burdened the creative art of that period. They were never without their enemies. We have seen how Aretino was pitted against Scaliger, Saint-Evremond against Boileau; and in every age the poets have astounded the critics by transgressing

rules without the sacrifice of beauty; but it was not until the end of the eighteenth century that the Romanticists banished them from the province of Criticism. The pedantry of our own day has borrowed 'conventions' from history and 'technique' from science as substitutes for the outworn formulae of the past; but these are merely new names for the old mechanical rules; and they too will go, when Criticism clearly recognizes in every work of art a spiritual creation governed by its own law.

We have done with the *genres*, or literary kinds. Their history is inseparably bound up with that of the classical rules. Certain works of literature have a general resemblance and are loosely classed together (for the sake of convenience) as lyric, comedy, tragedy, epic, pastoral, and the like; the classicists made of each of these divisions a fixed norm governed by inviolable laws. The separation of the *genres* was a consequence of this law of classicism: comedy should not be mingled with tragedy, nor epic with lyric. But no sooner was the law enunciated than it was broken by an artist impatient or ignorant of its restraints, and the critics have been obliged to explain away these violations of their laws, or gradually to change the laws themselves. But if art is organic expression, and every work of art is to be interrogated with the question, 'What has it expressed, and how completely?' there is no place for the question whether it has conformed to some convenient classification of critics or to some law derived from this classification. The lyric, the pastoral, the epic, are abstractions without concrete reality in the world of art. Poets do not really write epics, pastorals, lyrics,

however much they may be deceived by these false abstractions; they express themselves, and this expression is their only form. There are not, therefore, only three, or ten, or a hundred literary kinds; there are as many kinds as there are individual poets. But it is in the field of literary history that this error is most obvious. Shakespeare wrote *King Lear*, *Venus and Adonis*, and a sequence of sonnets. What becomes of Shakespeare, the creative artist, when these three works are separated from one another by the historian of poetry; when they lose their connection with his single creative soul, and are classified with other works with which they have only a loose and vague relation? To slice up the history of English literature into compartments marked comedy, tragedy, lyric, and the like, is to be guilty of a complete misunderstanding of the meaning of Criticism; and literary history becomes a logical absurdity when its data are not organically related but cut up into sections, and placed in such compartments as these. Only in one sense has any of these terms any profound significance, and that is the use of the word 'lyric' to represent the free expressiveness of art. All art is lyrical,—the *Divine Comedy*, *King Lear*, Rodin's 'Thinker', the Parthenon, a Corot landscape, a Bach fugue, or Isadora Duncan's dancing, as much as the songs of Heine or Shelley.

We have done with the comic, the tragic, the sublime, and an army of vague abstractions of their kind. These have grown out of the generalizations of the Alexandrian critics, acquiring a new lease of life in the eighteenth century. Gray and his friend West corresponded with each other on the subject

of the sublime; later, Schiller distinguished between the naïve and the sentimental; Jean Paul defined humour, and Hegel defined the tragic. If these terms represent the content of art, they may be relegated to the same category as joy, hate, sorrow, enthusiasm; and we should speak of the comic in the same general way in which we might speak of the expression of joy in a poem. If, on the other hand, these terms represent abstract classifications of poetry, their use in Criticism sins against the very nature of art. Every poet reëxpresses the universe in his own way, and every poem is a new and independent expression. The tragic does not exist for Criticism, but only Aeschylus and Calderón, Shakespeare and Racine. There is no objection to the use of the word tragic as a convenient label for somewhat similar poems, but to find laws for the tragic and to test creative artists by such laws as these is simply to give a more abstract form to the outworn classical conception of dramatic rules.

We have done with the theory of style, with metaphor, simile, and all the paraphernalia of Graeco-Roman rhetoric. These owe their existence to the assumption that style is separate from expression, that it is something that may be added or subtracted at will from the work of art, a flourish of the pen, an external embellishment, instead of the poet's individual vision of reality, the music of his whole manner of being. But we know that art *is* expression, that it is complete in itself, that to alter it is to create another expression and therefore to create another work of art. If the poet, for example, says of springtime that ''Tis now the blood runs gold', he has not employed a substitute for some-

thing else, such as 'the blood tingles in our veins'; he has expressed his thought in its completeness, and there is no equivalent for his expression except itself.

> Each perfect in its place; and each content
> With that perfection which its being meant.

Such expressions are still called metaphors in the textbooks; but metaphor, simile, and all the old terms of classical rhetoric are signs of the zodiac, magical incantations, astrological formulae, interesting only to antiquarian curiosity. To Montaigne they suggested 'the prattle of chambermaids'; to me they suggest rather the drone and singsong of many schoolmistresses. We still hear talk of the 'grand style', and essays on style continue to be written, like the old 'arts of poetry' of two centuries ago. But the theory of styles has no longer a real place in modern thought; we have learned that it is no less impossible to study style as separate from the work of art than to study the comic as separate from the work of the comic artist.

We have done with all moral judgment of art as art. Horace said that pleasure and profit are the function or end of poetry, and for many centuries the critics quarreled over the terms 'pleasure' and 'profit'. Some said that poetry was meant to instruct; some, merely to please; some, to do both. Romantic criticism first enunciated the principle that art has no aim except expression; that its aim is complete when expression is complete; that 'beauty is its own excuse for being'. It is not the inherent function of poetry to further any moral or social cause, any more than it is the function of

bridge-building to further the cause of Esperanto. The historian, the philosopher, the legislator, may consider a work of art, not as a work of art, but as a social document, just as the quarryman may consider a statue merely as so many pounds of marble, but in doing so they ignore its essential purpose and the fundamental source of its power. For if the achievement of the poet be to express any material he may select, and to express it with a completeness that we recognize as perfection, obviously morals can play no part in the judgment which Criticism may form of this artistic achievement. To say that poetry, as poetry, is moral or immoral is as meaningless as to say that an equilateral triangle is moral and an isosceles triangle immoral, or to speak of the immorality of a musical chord or a Gothic arch. It is only conceivable in a world in which dinner-table conversation runs after this fashion: 'This cauliflower would be good if it had only been prepared in accordance with international law.' 'Do you know why my cook's pastry is so good? Because he has never told a lie or seduced a woman.' We do not concern ourselves with morals when we test the engineer's bridge or the scientist's researches; indeed we go farther, and say that it is the moral duty of the scientist to disregard any theory of morals in his search for truth. Beauty's world is remote from both these standards; she aims neither at morals nor at truth. Her imaginary creations, by definition, make no pretense to reality, and cannot be judged by reality's tests. The poet's only moral duty, as a poet, is to be true to his art, and to express his vision of reality as well as he can. If the ideals enunciated by poets are not

those which we admire most, we must blame not the poets but ourselves: in the world where morals count we have failed to give them the proper material out of which to rear a nobler edifice. In so far as this is inherent in the nature of our humanity, it is not affected by the special conditions of any single society in space and time: though art is a symbol of the eternal conflict between aspiration and reality, it must at the same time remain forever a symbol of mortal imperfection. Critics everywhere except in America have ceased to test literature by the standards of ethics, and recognize in art an inevitable expression of a side of man's nature that can find no other realization except in it.

We have done with the confusion between the drama and the theater which has permeated dramatic criticism for over half a century. The theory that the drama is not a creative art, but a mere product of the physical exigencies of the theater, is as old as the sixteenth century. An Italian scholar of that age was the first to maintain that plays are intended to be acted on a stage, under certain restricted physical conditions, and before a large and heterogeneous crowd; dramatic performance has developed out of these conditions, and the test of its excellence is therefore the pleasure it gives to the mixed audience that supports it. This idea was taken hold of by some of the German Romanticists, for the purpose of justifying the Shakespearean drama in its apparent divergence from the classical 'rules'. Shakespeare cannot be judged by the rules of the Greek theater (so ran their argument), for the drama is an inevitable product of theatrical conditions; these conditions

in Elizabethan England were not the same as those of Periclean Athens; and it is therefore absurd to judge Shakespeare's practice by that of Sophocles. Here at least the idea helped to bring Shakespeare home to many new hearts by ridding the age of mistaken prejudices, and served a useful purpose, as a specious argument may persuade men to contribute to a noble work, or a mad fanatic may rid the world of a tyrant. But with this achievement its usefulness but not its life was ended. It has been developed into a system, and become a dogma of dramatic critics; it is our contemporary equivalent for the 'rules' of seventeenth-century pedantry. As a matter of fact, the dramatic artist is to be judged by no other standard than that applied to any other creative artist: what has he tried to express, and how has he expressed it? It is true that the theater is not only an art but a business, and the so-called 'success' of a play is of vital interest to the theater in so far as it is a commercial undertaking. 'The success may justify the playwright,' said an old French critic, 'but it may not be so easy to justify the success.' The test of 'success' is an economic test, and concerns not art or the criticism of art, but political economy. Valuable contributions to economic and social history have been made by students who have investigated the changing conditions of the theater and the vicissitudes of taste on the part of theatrical audiences; but these have the same relation to Criticism, and to the drama as an art, that a history of the publisher's trade and its influence on the personal fortunes of poets would bear to the history of poetry.

We have done with technique as separate from

art. It has been pointed out that style cannot be disassociated from art; and the false air of science which the term 'technique' seems to possess should not blind us to the fact that it too involves the same error. 'Technique is really personality; that is the reason why the artist cannot teach it, why the pupil cannot learn it, and why the aesthetic critic cannot understand it,' says Oscar Wilde, in a dialogue on 'The Critic as Artist', which, amid much perversity and paradox, is illumined by many flashes of strange insight. The technique of poetry cannot be separated from its inner nature. Versification cannot be studied by itself, except loosely and for convenience; it remains always an inherent quality of the single poem. No two poets ever write in the same meter. Milton's line:—

These my sky-robes spun out of Iris' woof.

is called an iambic pentameter; but it is not true that artistically it has something in common with every other line possessing the same succession of syllables and accents; in this sense it is not an iambic pentameter; it is only one thing; it is the line:—

These my sky-robes spun out of Iris' woof.

We have done with the history and criticism of poetic themes. It is possible to speak loosely of the handling of such a theme as Prometheus by Aeschylus and by Shelley, of the story of Francesca da Rimini by Dante, Stephen Phillips, and D'Annunzio, or the story of King Arthur by Malory and Tennyson; but strictly speaking, they are not employing the same theme at all. Each artist is expressing a certain material and labelling it with an historic name.

For Shelley Prometheus is only a label; he is expressing his artistic conception of life, not the history of a Greek Titan. It is the vital flame he has breathed into his work that makes it what it is, and with this vital flame (and not with labels) the critic should concern himself in the works of poets. The answer must be given to those critics who insist on the use of contemporary material in poetry, and praise the poets whose subjects are drawn from the life of our own time. But even if it were possible for critics to determine in advance the subject matter of poetry or to impose subjects on poets, how can a poet deal with anything but contemporary material? How can a twentieth-century poet, even when he imagines that he is concerned with Greek or Egyptian life, deal with any subject but the life of his own time, except in the most external and superficial detail? Cynics have said since the first outpourings of men's hearts, 'There is nothing new in art; there are no new subjects.' But the very reverse is true. There are no old subjects; every subject is new as soon as it has been transformed by the imagination of the poet.

We have done with the race, the time, the environment of a poet's work as an element in Criticism. To study these phases of a work of art is to treat it as an historic or social document, and the result is a contribution to the history of culture or civilization, with only a subsidiary interest for the history of art. We are not here concerned with the value of such studies as empirical preparations or concomitants, but only in their relation to the essential and inherent nature of the critical act. 'Granted the times, the environment, the race, the

passions of the poet, what has he done with his materials, how has he converted poetry out of reality?' To answer this question of the Italian De Sanctis as it refers to each single work of art is to perform what is truly the critic's vital function; this is to interpret 'expression' in its rightful sense, and to liberate aesthetic Criticism from the vassalage to *Kulturgeschichte* imposed on it by the school of Taine.

We have done with the 'evolution' of literature. The concept of progress was first applied to literature in the seventeenth century, but at the very outset Pascal pointed out that a distinction must here be made between science and art; that science advances by accumulation of knowledge, while the changes of art cannot be reduced to any theory of progress. As a matter of fact, the theory involves the ranking of poets according to some arbitrary conception of their value; and the ranking of writers in order of merit has become obsolete, except in the 'hundred best books' of the last decade and the 'five-foot shelves' of yesterday. The later nineteenth century gave a new air of verisimilitude to this old theory by borrowing the term 'evolution' from science; but this too involves a fundamental misconception of the free and original movement of art. A similar misconception is involved in the study of the 'origins' of art; for art has no origin separate from man's life.

> In climes beyond the solar road,
> Where shaggy forms o'er ice-built mountains roam,
> The Muse has broke the twilight-gloom;

but though she wore savage raiment, she was no less the Muse. Art is simple at times, complex at

others, but it is always art. The simple art of early times may be studied with profit; but the researches of anthropology have no vital significance for Criticism, unless the anthropologist studies the simplest forms of art in the same spirit as its highest; that is, unless the anthropologist is an aesthetic critic.

Finally, we have done with the old rupture between genius and taste. When Criticism first propounded as its real concern the oft-repeated question: 'What has the poet tried to express and how has he expressed it?' Criticism prescribed for itself the only possible method. How can the critic answer this question without becoming (if only for a moment of supreme power) at one with the creator? That is to say, taste must reproduce the work of art within itself in order to understand and judge it; and at that moment aesthetic judgment becomes nothing more nor less than creative art itself. The identity of genius and taste is the final achievement of modern thought on the subject of art, and it means that fundamentally, in their most significant moments, the creative and the critical instincts are one and the same. From Goethe to Carlyle, from Carlyle to Arnold, from Arnold to Symons, there has been much talk of the 'creative function' of Criticism. For each of these men the phrase held a different content; for Arnold it meant merely that Criticism creates the intellectual atmosphere of the age,—a social function of high importance, perhaps, yet wholly independent of aesthetic significance. But the ultimate truth toward which these men were tending was more radical than that, and plays havoc with the old platitudes about the sterility of taste. Criticism at last can free itself of

its age-long self-contempt, now that it may realize that aesthetic judgment and artistic creation are instinct with the same vital life. This identity does not sum up the whole life of the complex and difficult art of Criticism; but it is this identity which has been lost sight of and needs most emphasis now, for without it Criticism would really be impossible. 'Genius is to aesthetics what the ego is to philosophy, the only supreme and absolute reality,' said Schelling; and without subduing the mind to this transcendental system, it remains true that what must always be inexplicable to mere reflection is just what gives power to poetry; that intellectual curiosity may amuse itself by asking its little questions of the silent sons of light, but they vouchsafe no answer to the art's pale shadow, thought; the gods are kind if they give up their secret in another work of art, the art of Criticism, that serves as some sort of mirror to the art of literature, only because in their flashes of insight taste and genius are one.

STUART P. SHERMAN

1881–1926

THE DEMOCRACY OF MARK TWAIN[1]

(1917)

ANY one who has thought of Mark Twain merely as the author of many books may well be recommended to make his acquaintance as a puissant American personality through the three thick volumes of Mr. Paine's biography. As an inducement to that considerable undertaking I record here the experience of a reader who approached the enterprise with a distinct apprehension that he would be overtaken by fatigue before he emerged from the two-hundred-and-ninety-sixth chapter and plunged into the twenty-four appendices. He was thinking of Mark Twain as a humorous writer; and his mind was still irritated by memories of the extravagant admirers who in recent years have saluted the veteran of a thousand ovations as a superlative artist, a profound moralist, and a grave philosopher. He reflected on the fact that the biographer was something of an idolater and that his biography was the fruit of six years' labor, during four of which the subject had offered himself for study, and had dictated volumes of recollections. He suspected that these 1,719 pages would constitute a last disproportionate monument under which the old humorist would be buried. Then he opened the book and began to read.

[1] Reprinted from *On Contemporary Literature*, by permission of Henry Holt & Co.

When he left off reading, two or three days later, he found it difficult to escape from the interesting illusion that he himself was Mark Twain. He felt as if he had just returned from a prolonged exploration of the world, and were rounding out in tranquility a restless life that had extended over three-quarters of a century. He looked back over a stream of experience of historical breadth and national significance. He had been carried back to the days of Andrew Jackson, and, with the hope and hunger of the westward migration, had drifted as the slave-holding John Clemens out of Kentucky into Tennessee and on to Missouri, and there had died, dreaming in poverty of his 75,000 acres of land unsaleable at twenty-five cents an acre. In 1835 he had been born again in his son, Samuel Langhorne Clemens. Half-educated, mischievous, and clever, he had set type for a struggling little journal in Hannibal, Missouri, ten years before the Civil War, and had made his first 'sensation' by printing in his brother's paper a poem very faintly reminiscent of Robert Burns, inscribed 'To Mary in H—l' (Hannibal). He had taken one end of a Testament, his mother holding the other, and had promised not to 'throw a card or drink a drop of liquor', and had set out to see the world, still as a printer, in St. Louis, New York, Philadelphia, Keokuk, and Cincinnati. But then he heard the call of the Father of Waters, and for four years was pilot, and studied the intricate mysteries of the Mississippi, and laughed and jested with rivermen from St. Louis to New Orleans, till a shell from the Union batteries exploded in front of his pilot-house and ended that chapter. Then for a few days as second lieutenant

of an extemporized militia company, he rode a small yellow mule to the aid of the Confederacy. Next the golden flare in the far West caught his eye, and, couched among the mail-bags behind six galloping horses, he swapped yarns across seventeen hundred miles of plains till he reached Carson City, and became a miner, and suffered the quotidian fever of the prospector, and filled his trunk with 'wild-cat' stock, and knew the fierce life of frontier saloons and gambling hells. From the unremunerative pick and shovel he turned to the boisterous, bowie-knife journalism of the *Enterprise*, and thence to vitriolic humor on the *Morning Call* in San Francisco, and he sent his name to the Atlantic Coast with *The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, and lined his pockets with gold by a great news 'scoop' in the Sandwich Islands.

It was 1866, he was thirty-one years old, and his 'career' had just begun. He now entered a forty-year engagement as a public lecturer, and competed successfully with Fanny Kemble and P. T. Barnum, and made himself known to hundreds of thousands whom he convulsed with laughter. At the same time he became a great traveler, perlustrated the cities of his native land, plundered the vineyards of Greece, presented an address to the Czar, visited Jerusalem with the Innocents, sojourned in England and gossiped with the Prince of Wales, in Germany and dined with the Emperor, in India and was entertained by a native prince in Bombay, interceded with President Kruger for the prisoners of the Jameson Raid, captured the cities of Australia and New Zealand, and exacted tribute from the whole world. Three or four years after the Civil War he

had begun to throw off books as a comet throws off meteors. Then he took up the burdens of a publisher, bargained with General Grant for his memoirs, and sold a quarter of a million copies where the other bidder had planned for a sale of five or ten thousand. His imagination took fire at a dream of magnificent wealth, and he became a great speculator, and in one year invested $100,000 in projects, and sank a fortune in an unperfected type-setting machine, and went into bankruptcy. Then, at the age of sixty, he girded himself anew and made another fortune in three years and repaid his creditors to the last dollar, and in a few years more had accumulated a third fortune for himself, and drew annual royalties equal to the salary of the President of the United States, and built himself splendid mansions, and rested from his labors on an Italian mahogany bed, clad in a dressing-gown of Persian silk. Then the University of Oxford summoned the printer, pilot, miner, traveler, lecturer, author, publisher, capitalist, across the sea, and robed him in scarlet, and made him a Doctor of Letters, and he retired into unofficial public life till, in 1910, the call came to set his course toward the sinking sun.

This is not the biography of an author; it is a part of the prose Odyssey of the American people; and it will continue to be read when many of Mark Twain's writings are forgotten. It will continue to be read because it conveys in relatively brief compass the total effect which he spent his lifetime in producing—with American recklessness and prodigality, with floods of garrulous improvisation. Mr. Paine loiters a little, it is true, through the years of

Mark Twain's final prosperity, but that was the period of his personal relations with his hero, and we must forgive him if, like an artist infatuated with his subject, he paints us several portraits differing only slightly in attitude and shading. His first two volumes are really marvels of compression; he disposes, for example, of the trip to Palestine in twenty-odd pages, and of the voyage around the world in less; yet very likely he tells about as much of those famous expeditions as after the lapse of a hundred years a more sophisticated posterity will stay to hear. From first to last he rejects tempting opportunities to digress into history and overflow into description; he supplies only so much setting as serves to bring the actor into higher relief. He is under an illusion, I believe, as to the value of Mark Twain's theology and philosophy and literature; but his sense of what we may call biographical value is admirable. His book is full of animated and characteristic phrase, gesture, and attitude. He has extenuated nothing of his hero's weakness or his strength, and has set forth with all possible veracity the processes through which the man of the frontier became, without losing his essence and his tang, quite literally the man of the world.

No one recognized more frankly than Mark Twain himself that in a sense he was a raider from the Border. He never pretended to be the thing that he was not, and, on the other hand, he was never ashamed of the thing that he was. He planted himself, according to the Emersonian injunction, squarely upon his instincts, accepted 'the society of his contemporaries, the connection of events', and, with a happy faculty for turning everything to

account, capitalized his very limitations. It was one of the secrets of his immense personal effect that he never felt nor looked like a scholar or a thought-worn literary person, but rather like a man of affairs—erect, handsome, healthy, debonair—in his earlier years like a prosperous ranchman, later like a financier, a retired field-marshal, an ambassador, or, as his friends would have it, like a king. It was an iron constitution, tempered in the mississippi and tested in the mining camps of the West, that enabled him to endure the stupendous fatigues of his great lecturing tours, to throw off 100,000 words of a novel in six weeks, to toil—without exercise and smoking heavily—all day and half the night, and, when he was past seventy, to talk copyright for hours with a hundred and fifty different Congressmen and radiate superfluous energy at a dinner in the evening, or to play billiards with his biographer till four o'clock in the morning.

If a kind of unconscious frontier impudence persuaded him of his competency as a Biblical critic, and carried him into the realm of abstract ethics, and led him late in life to add the weight of his authority to the followers of Delia Bacon, it was a kindred and valuable mental innocence that made the first fifty years of his life a perpetual voyage of discovery, sharpened his observation and his appetite for experience, and preserved the vernacular vigor of his speech. Had he undergone in his formative period the discipline of an older and firmly stratified society, he would have been saved from some lapses in taste, but he would have lacked that splendid self-confidence which is born of living

among a relatively homogeneous folk, and which in the long run explained his unrivaled power, on the platform and in print, of getting in touch with his public. As pilot, miner, and Nevada journalist he found his most profitable associates among men rather than among women, and formed the habit of addressing himself to a robust masculine audience —a habit which gives him an almost unique distinction in American literature, and marks him clearly as belonging to the heroic age. He was 'a man's man'. It is a significant fact that he was introduced to his future wife by her brother, who had become a great friend of his on the voyage of the Innocents. It is an equally significant fact that the friendship terminated and the brother departed on a journey when he learned that the humorist intended to marry his sister. If Mark Twain ever became a lion among the ladies, it was because they liked lions, not because he made any special concessions to the ladies. He detested Jane Austen, her works, and her world; and unabashed he accounted for his antipathy: 'When I take up one of Jane Austen's books, such as *Pride and Prejudice*, I feel like a barkeeper entering the kingdom of heaven'. What he thought of the 'kingdom of heaven' he has set forth in another place.

No American writer has ever enjoyed a more purely democratic reputation than Mark Twain. From village celebrity to international renown, he has been advanced stage after stage by popular suffrage. The plain, unbookish citizen holding both his sides at a public lecture has helped roar him into eminence. The freckled, brown-legged pirate who finds Tom Sawyer nearer to his business and

his bosom than Robinson Crusoe has played no negligible part in the campaign. The vote of the retired merchant reading *A Tramp Abroad* in preparation for a European holiday told decisively in his favor before the tardy voice of the professional critic assented. Only when an overwhelming majority of his fellow countrymen had established his position, did the universities formally recognize the fact. And one suspects that for him as he strolled into the Sheldonian Theatre clad in scarlet to receive his degree from Oxford the pleasantest note of the occasion was the 'very satisfactory hurrah' from the audience.

In the last few years of his life he received a higher honor than a degree from any university, however venerable; he received the highest honor within the gift of the Republic. Let us distinguish here, not his three 'manners' but the three aspects of his reputation. Like a political orator making his maiden speech or invading hostile territory, Mark Twain had broken the reserve of his first audience with a string of irresistible 'funny stories' and a comic recital of his travels. Handicapped by uproarious laughter, he produced a number of books which demanded serious consideration, but his leonine head had grown gray before he lived down his reputation as a 'platform humorist'. At about the time of his seventieth birthday, however, he obtained a reconsideration of his case, and the gravest tribunals decided that he indubitably belonged in the history of literature, if, indeed, he was not the 'foremost American man of letters'. After that, national feeling about him crystalized rapidly into its final state. He appeared in white

flannels in midwinter, declaring that white was the only wear for a man with seventy clean years behind him; we were significantly pleased. When our newspapers had made one of their occasional 'little breaks' in reporting the result of his serious illness, he cabled from the Bermudas that the reports of his death were 'greatly exaggerated'. It was a phrase that we all envied, from our Presidential phrase-maker down; we recognized that he was no longer a mere literary man—he was a national character. When he died we abandoned the last reservation. We said with one voice: *He was an American.*

To the foreign critic this ultimate tribute may seem perplexingly cheap and anticlimactic. That is, of course, due to the mistaken notion that we number some five score millions of Americans. As a matter of fact, we number our Americans on our ten fingers; the rest of us are merely citizens of the United States. Any one who will take the trouble to be born may become a citizen. To become an American requires other talents. We are more than doubtful about the status of Washington: he was the Father of his Country, but he lacked a certain indispensable tang. Lowell—forgetting Franklin, who had the tang—said that Lincoln was the first American. From certain indications it looks as if Mr. Roosevelt might turn out to be an American. Only the other day[1] he sent us a message to this effect: 'I know that the American people will agree that I could have acted in no other way than I did act.' The American is a man of destiny. His word and deed flow inevitably out of the American

[1] Written in 1910.

character. On the one hand, he does a thing because it is right; on the other hand, the thing is right because he does it. Revising the thought of Henry V we may say, Nice customs curtsy to great Americans.

This point is strikingly illustrated by a story which Mark Twain tells on himself in one of the chapters of his autobiography. It was in 1877, before a company including all the leading 'geniuses' of New England, banqueting in honor of Whittier's birthday. When Mark Twain's turn came, he rose and entered upon a fictitious 'reminiscence'. Out in southern California he had knocked at a miner's cabin, and announced himself as a literary man. The miner replied with marked ill-humor that he had just got rid of three of them, 'Mr. Longfellow, Mr. Emerson, Mr. Oliver Wendell Holmes—consound the lot. . . . Mr. Emerson was a seedy little bit of a chap, red-headed; Mr. Holmes was as fat as a balloon; he weighed as much as three hundred, and had double chins all the way down to his stomach. Mr. Longfellow was built like a prize fighter. . . . They had been drinking, I could see that.' And so on.

At the words 'consound the lot', Twain had expected a peal of laughter, but to his amazement 'the expression of interest in the faces turned to a sort of black frost'. The whole story was a dismal failure; it was years before the author recovered from the shame of it. Speaking for the moment as a pious reader of O. W. Holmes, James Russell Lowell, and *The Atlantic Monthly*, I am not in the least surprised at the New England frost. And I know very well that Jane Austen or Thackeray or

George Meredith would have agreed with the New England geniuses that Mark Twain's reminiscence was a piece of crude, heavy, intellectual horse-play —an impudent affront offered to Puritan aristocracy by a rough-handed plebeian jester from Missouri. But hear Mark Twain thirty years after the event:

'I have read it twice, and unless I am an idiot, it hasn't a single defect in it from the first word to the last. It is just as good as can be. It is smart; it is saturated with humor. There isn't a suggestion of coarseness or vulgarity in it anywhere. What could have been the matter with that house? . . . If I had those beloved and revered old literary immortals back here . . . I would melt them till they'd run all over that stage!'

In his mellow Indian summer Mark Twain himself grew conscious that he had become an American. He knew, therefore, that the speech was right, *because he had made it*. I confess to a doubt whether those 'old literary immortals' would, if they were among us, laugh at it even now; for the man who laughs with Mark Twain must be capable of feeling himself, for the moment, neither better nor worse than 'the overwhelming majority' of his fellow citizens; and the New England 'immortals' were incapable of feeling themselves in that mean position, even for a moment.

Mr. Paine, like some other recent critics, dwells with a kind of retaliatory gusto upon the Brahminical reservations in the welcome accorded Mark Twain by members of the older New England inner circle; he is sure that the world is now having its laugh at the Brahmins. He reminds us also that, while Twain was still on a kind of nervous proba-

tion in America, he had been received with unrestrained delight in England. But the right explanation of the hesitation on this side of the water does not seem to have occurred to him. The fact is that Twain was hailed with jubilation by Englishmen because he answered perfectly to their preconceptions of the American character and to their long-standing demand for something 'indigenous'. They could enjoy him, furthermore, with the same detached curiosity and glee that their ancestors at the Court of James I felt in the presence of Pocahontas—another typical American who, as we read, received marked attention from the Queen, and accompanied her to the Twelfth Night revels. We imagine that some gentlemen in Virginia were a little anxious lest it should be thought in England that all their wives were Indian—without deeming it at all necessary to apologize for Pocahontas; she was a lovely barbarian, to be sure, but she was truly representative only of the dusky background of their civilization. The Brahmins, correctly enough, looked upon Mark Twain, and will continue to look upon him, as a robust frontiersman, produced in the remote Jacksonian era, carrying into the courts of kings the broad laughter of the plains, and representing an American that, for them, is already historical and almost fabulous. But they should no more condescend to this Herculean humorist than to any other epic hero; they should accept him heartily as they accept Robin Hood and Charlemagne, the wily Odysseus and Dick Whittington, thrice Lord Mayor of London.

In the America that lies outside the chilly state of mind called New England, Mark Twain has

rather won than lost friends by the savory earthiness, the naïve impudence, the lucky undisciplined strength of the folk hero. By his fearless revelation of the reaction of a frontiersman in contact with the riper aspects of civilization, he has appealed profoundly to the elements of the pioneer that have lurked in the hearts of his countrymen from the days of Captain John Smith to the days of Colonel Roosevelt. 'Whenever I enjoy anything in art', he wrote to a friend, 'it means that it is mighty poor. The private knowledge of this fact has saved me from going to pieces with enthusiasm in front of many a chromo.' To ears outside of New England the sound of that is endearingly American. In his famous but somewhat heavy-handed attack upon a French critic's accounts of 'these States', he declared that there is nothing 'characteristically American' except drinking ice water. But on the occasion of a railway accident he remarked, 'It is characteristically American—always trying to get along short-handed and save wages'. If the eulogists of his humor held themselves to a strict inquisition, they would find themselves praising, sometimes his legitimate triumphs and sometimes —with an admiration for success that is characteristically American—his infractions of the laws of taste. His humor not infrequently depends upon a disregard of proprieties, and occasionally it consists of little but a disregard of properties. An illustration may be found in the one-hundred-and-twenty-third chapter of the biography. The humor on this occasion consisted in reminding General Grant and his veterans of the army of the Tennessee and the six hundred guests at a great and solemn

banquet that once upon a time their grim commander-in-chief was wholly occupied in trying to get his great toe into his mouth—'and if the child is but the father of the man, there are mighty few who will doubt that he succeeded'. The house, we are informed, came down with a crash, and General Sherman exclaimed, 'I don't know how you do it!' That was humor befitting the Welsh giants of the Mabinogion or rather the bronzed revelers in Carson City. Only a very eminent American, speaking not in Boston but in Chicago, could—in the characteristic American phrase—have 'gotten away with it'. It was a crime against taste, colossal, barbaric—or it would have been in any society which stood upon its dignity, recognized sacred superiorities, and exacted deferences.

Now the black frost which followed Mark Twain's after-dinner speech in Boston, and the thunder of applause which followed his similar after-dinner speech in Chicago indicate clearly enough, first, that he was out of place in Holmes's New England, and, secondly, that he was quite at home in Walt Whitman's leveled America. 'I paint myriads of heads', cried Whitman, 'but I paint no head without its nimbus of gold-colored light.' At a banqueting table where every head is nimbused, what is elsewhere reprehended as indecorum passes for easy democratic familiarity. Among the descendants of the high priests of the Puritans Mark Twain discovered to his surprise that he was regarded as an unsanctified Philistine. On neither of these occasions was his 'effrontery' a mere effusion of individual 'impudence'. It was rather an ingenuous assertion of the new democratic *camaraderie*—a

rough western interpretation of the 'brotherhood of man', which in the good-natured Mississippi Valley encourages the 'hobo' in quest of a cup of coffee to ring the front door-bell and accost the lady of a house as 'sister', or permits the colored porter to drop into a seat for a chat with the Pullman passenger, or prompts the Reverend 'Billy' Sunday, the Henry Ward Beecher of that 'section', to clap the Almighty on the back and to box the ears of the Prince of Darkness. In Boston Mark Twain spoke to an audience which freely entertained the abstract idea of equality, but which was by no means ready to accept all these practical consequences of the fraternal ideal. In Chicago he spoke to an audience of veterans who in the Civil War had felt the kin-making physical touches of nature, and had lost some of their reverence for the starchy decencies and linen distinctions of formal society. In more or less conscious rebellion against the idea of the 'grand style', which demands the representation of a military hero as mounted on a splendid charger with forefeet pawing the air, he brought down the house by a humorous stroke of the new 'realism', which insists upon reminding the public that even a military hero is on common footing with the average man in the possession and strategic manipulation of his great toe. The success of this effort may perhaps not improperly be regarded as an omen of the declining power of the New England tradition in American literature—the partial eclipse of Holmes by Mark Twain, of Longfellow by Whitman, of Hawthorne by the Hoosier novelists, of Whittier by Edgar Lee Masters. 'Who are you, indeed,' exclaims Whitman, 'who

would talk or sing in America?' The antiphonal voice replies: 'I swear I will have each quality of my race in myself. Talk as you like, he only suits These States whose manners favor the audacity and sublime turbulence of The States.'

Humor, it is agreed, consists in contrasts and incongruities, and the essence of Mark Twain's most characteristic humor consists in contrasting this typical nimbused American, compacted of golden mediocrities, against the world—consists in showing the incongruity of the rest of the world with this nimbused American. In so far as that is true, it necessarily follows that the heights and depths of humor are beyond the reaches of Mark Twain's soul. His laughter is burly, not fine; broad, not profound; and, in his earlier works, national, not universal. When he that sitteth in the heavens laughs, as we are assured that he does, he is not contrasting the year 1776 with the year 1300, nor the President of the United States with Louis XVI, nor the uncrowned sovereigns of Missouri with the serfs of Europe. The comparison is intolerable; let us mark a lowlier difference. When Puck in the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, looks upon the bewildered Athenian lovers and exclaims, 'Lord, what fools these mortals be'; when Titania, waking from magical sleep, murmurs with drowsy amusement, 'Methought I was enamoured of an ass'—the mirth of these subtle creatures is kindled by the contrast between the humanity of Bottom and the Athenians, and the exquisite manners and passions of elf-land. If Mark Twain had revised the play, he would have had some Yankee boy in overalls making sport of Puck and Titania; such, at any rate, is the humor

of *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* and of *Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven*. It is said that the last book he read was Carlyle's *French Revolution*. He must have found its picturesque and savage denunciation of ancient shams very much to his taste; but his own work shows little trace of its peculiar heart-searching humor—the humor begotten by a reflective comparison of the upstart, red-blooded pageant of time's latest hour with the dim, grim phantasms of history: 'Charlemagne sleeps at Salzburg, with truncheon grounded, only fable expecting that he will waken. Charles the Hammer, Pepin Bow-legged, where now is their eye of menace, their voice of command? Rollo and his shaggy Northmen cover not the Seine with ships, but have sailed off on a longer voyage. The hair of Tow-head (Tête d'étoupes) now needs no combing; Iron-cutter (Taillefer) cannot cut a cobweb; shrill Fredegonda, shrill Brunhilda, have had out their hot life-scold, and lie silent, their hot life-frenzy cooled. . . . They are all gone; sunk—down, down with the tumult they made; and the rolling and trampling of ever new generations passes over them; and they hear it not any more forever.'

Carlyle's humor has what we call historical depth; he laughs at his contemporaries with a bygone eternity. When Whitman asks that sardonic question, 'Whom have you slaughtered lately, European headsman?' millions of strange shadows tend on him. He, too, is a humorist and a grave one; he laughs prophetically—with an eternity to come. Mark Twain, looking neither before nor after, laughs, when he is in his popular vein, with the present hour; and he cannot stand the comparison.

Not by his subtlety nor his depth nor his elevation but by his understanding and his unflinching assertion of the ordinary self of the ordinary American —'the divine average'—did Mark Twain become, as some critics are now calling him, 'our foremost man of letters'.

He was geographically an American; he knew his land and its idioms at first hand—Missouri, the Mississippi River and its banks, Nevada, California, New England, New York, the great cities. It was insufficiently recognized before his time that to love one's country intelligently one must know its body, as well as its mind. He had the good fortune to be born in the West; so that, of course, he had to go east—otherwise he might, instead of becoming an American, have remained a mere Bostonian or New Yorker all his life, and never have learned to love Chicago and San Francisco at all. At various times and places, he was pilot, printer, editor, reporter, miner, lecturer, author, and publisher. But during the first half of his life he went most freely with 'powerful uneducated persons, and with the young, and with the mothers of families'. The books in which he draws upon his life in the West—*Tom Sawyer*, *Roughing it*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *Life on the Mississippi*—are almost entirely delightful. They are brimful of unreflective boyhood and youth, of rude energy and high spirits, of pluck and rough adventure; they are richly provincial and spontaneous; they spring luxuriantly out of their fresh native earth. One accepts them and rejoices in them as one accepts a bluff on the Mississippi or as one rejoices in a pine tree on a red spur of the Rockies.

It is when a frontiersman carries his virtues

abroad that the lines of his character become salient. Mark Twain was a self-made man, of 'small Latin and less Greek', deficient in historical sympathy and imagination, insensitive to delicate social differences, content and at home in modern workaday realities. I confess with great apprehension that I do not much care for his books of foreign travel. Like the story told on Whittier's birthday, they are 'smart and saturated with humor'; but for some almost indefinable reason my emotions fail to enter into the spirit of the occasion. An uneasy doubt about the point of view binds my mirth as with a 'black frost'. I find myself concerned for my fellow citizen, the author behind the books; beneath the surface gaiety the whole affair seems to be of appalling seriousness for us both. Ostensibly light-hearted burlesques of the poetical and sentimental volumes of travel, these books are in reality an amazingly faithful record of the way Europe and the Orient strike the 'divine average' —the typical American—the man for whom the world was created in 1776. Wandering through exhumed Pompeii, he peoples its solemn ruins with the American proletariat, and fancies that he sees upon the walls of its theatre the placard, 'Positively No Free List, Except Members of the Press'. He digresses from an account of the ascent of Vesuvius to compare the prices of gloves, linen shirts, and dress suits in Paris and in Italy. At length arrived at the summit of the mountain, he describes its crater as a 'circular ditch'; some of the party light their cigars in the fissures; he descends, observing that the volcano is a poor affair when compared with Kilauea, in the Sandwich Islands. He visits

the Parthenon in the night; obviously, the memorable feature of the expedition was robbing the vineyards on the way back to the ship. The most famous picture galleries of Europe are hung with 'celebrated rubbish'; the immemorial Mosque of St. Sophia is the 'mustiest barn in heathendom'; the Sea of Galilee is nothing to Lake Tahoe. The Mississippi pilot, homely, naïve, arrogantly candid, refuses to sink his identity in the object contemplated —that, as Corporal Nym would have said, is the humor of it. He is the kind of traveling companion that makes you wonder why you went abroad. He turns the Old World into a laughing-stock by shearing it of its storied humanity—simply because nothing is holier to him than a joke. He does not merely throw the comic light upon counterfeit enthusiasm; he laughs at art, history, and antiquity from the point of view of one who is ignorant of them and pretty well satisfied with his ignorance. And, unless I am very much mistaken, the 'overwhelming majority' of his fellow citizens—those who made the success of *Innocents Abroad* and *A Tramp Abroad*—have laughed with him, not at him. So, too, unquestionably, in the nearly parallel case of the bludgeoning burlesque, *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court.*

There is always a great multitude of what Matthew Arnold calls Philistines ready to rise up and hail as a deliverer any bold influential spokesman who will rail against the idea of 'the saving remnant', and will assure the world that it is an idle affectation, an anaemic refinement, to pretend to admire the sort of things that Matthew Arnold urged us to admire. In Mark Twain's frequent

excursions into literary criticism there is a note which escapes being demagogic only by being extravagantly and comically sincere. Let us take for example this little burst of revolt against the English Classics in *Following the Equator:* 'Also, to be fair, there is another word of praise due to this ship's library: it contains no copy of the *Vicar of Wakefield*, that strange menagerie of complacent hypocrites and idiots, of theatrical cheap-john heroes and heroines, who are always showing off, of bad people who are not interesting, and good people who are fatiguing. A singular book. Not a sincere line in it, and not a character that invites respect; a book which is one long waste-pipe discharge of goody-goody puerilities and dreary moralities; a book which is full of pathos which revolts and humor which grieves the heart. . . .

'Jane Austen's books, too, are absent from this library. Just that one omission alone would make a fairly good library out of a library that hadn't a book in it.'

When a reader of cultivated taste comes upon a passage like that, he sighs and says, 'Mark Twain was not a literary critic'; but when the 'man in the street' comes upon such a passage, he chuckles and says, 'Mark Twain was an honest man'. As there are always more men in the street than readers of cultivated taste, Mark Twain is justified by a large popular majority. It thus appears that what endears a public man to us is what he has in common with us—not his occasional supremacies. It does not damage Franklin to say that he was not so graceful as Lord Chesterfield; nor Lincoln to say that he was not so handsome as Count D'Orsay;

nor Mr. Roosevelt to say that one misses in his literary style I know not what that one finds in the style of Walter Pater. Writing from Khartum, our Lion hunter tells us that, in consequence of hard service in camp, his pigskin books were 'stained with blood, sweat, gun oil, dust, and ashes'. We have a mystical feeling that this is very appropriate and beautiful—that an American's books ought to be stained with gun oil and ashes. 'Fear grace—fear delicatesse', cries the author of 'Chants Democratic'. It does not damage Mark Twain with his constituency to say that there was not a drop of the aristocrat in his veins.

His disrespect for aristocratic institutions and distinctions both in life and literature is piquantly illustrated by his criticism of the French Revolution, Sir Walter Scott, and the American South in *Life on the Mississippi*.

'Against the crimes of the French Revolution and of Bonaparte may be set two compensating benefactions: the Revolution broke the chains of the *ancien régime* and of the Church, and made a nation of abject slaves a nation of free-men; and Bonaparte instituted the setting of merit above birth, and also so completely stripped the divinity from royalty that, whereas crowned heads in Europe were gods before, they are only men since, and can never be gods again, but only figure-heads, and answerable for their acts like common clay. Such benefactions as these compensate the temporary harm which Bonaparte and the Revolution did, and leave the world in debt to them for these great and permanent services to liberty, humanity, and progress.

'Then comes Sir Walter Scott with his enchantments, and by his single might checks this wave of progress, and even turns it back; sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and degraded systems of government; with the silliness and emptiness, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society. He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote. Most of the world has now outlived a good part of these harms, though by no means all of them; but in our South they flourish pretty forcefully still. Not so forcefully as half a century ago, perhaps, but still forcefully. There, the *genuine and wholesome civilization of the nineteenth century* (my italics) is curiously confused and commingled with the Walter Scott Middle-Age sham civilization, and so you have practical common-sense, progressive ideas, and progressive work mixed up with the duel, the inflated speech, and the jejune romanticism of an absurd past that is dead, and out of charity ought to be buried. But for the Sir Walter disease, the character of the Southerner—or Southron, according to Sir Walter's starchier way of phrasing it—would be wholly modern, in place of modern and mediaeval mixed, and the South would be fully a generation further advanced than it is. It was Sir Walter that made every gentleman in the South a major or a colonel, or a general or a judge, before the war; and it was he, also, that made these gentlemen value the bogus decorations. For it was he that created rank and caste down there, and also reverence for rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them.'

As this passage indicates, Mark Twain was a radical, resolute, and rather uncritical democrat, committed to the principles of the preamble to the Constitution, preserving a tang of Tom Paine's contempt for kings, and not without a suggestion of the republican insolence caricatured by Dickens in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. He did not and could not give a 'square deal' to the South or to Scott or to Europe or to the Arthurian realm. He refused all recognition to aristocratic virtues which retard the complete establishment of the brotherhood of man. He was not, like some more exquisite men of letters, a democrat in his study and a snob in his drawing-room; he was of the people and for the people at all times. His tender regard for the social contract permeated his humor. It will be remembered that Pudd'nhead Wilson earned his nickname and ruined his chances as a lawyer for twenty years by an incomprehensible remark about a howling dog. 'I wish I owned half of that dog,' said Wilson. 'Why?' somebody asked. 'Because I would kill my half.' No one understood him—the sensitive, symbolic democracy of the expression was too compact for their intelligence, and they fell into a delicious discussion of how one-half could be killed without injury to the other half. That, to be sure, is also one of the problems of democracy; but Wilson's implications were, I believe, both simpler and deeper than that. In not molesting another man's dog he showed the American reverence for property. The American desire to be moderately well-to-do (Mr. Roosevelt's 'neither rich nor poor') he indicated by desiring to own only half the dog. In saying that he would kill his half he expressed his

sacred and unalienable right to dispose of his own property as he chose, while at the same time he recognized his neighbor's sacred and unalienable right to let his half of the property howl. Indeed, I am not sure that he did not recognize that the dog had a certain property right in howling.

With almost every qualification for a successful political career, Mark Twain could never have aspired to the Presidency, for he was not a regular attendant at church, a shortcoming, by the way, which interfered seriously with Mr. Taft's campaign till his former pastor testified in the public prints that the candidate had once at a church social taken the part of a fairy. In religion, Twain appeared to be a mugwump, or, more classically speaking, an agnostic over whom had fallen the shadow of Robert Ingersoll of pious memory. The irreligion of that generation is touched with a raw, philistine rationalism, but is thoroughly honest. Like all Americans, the author of *Tom Sawyer* received his religious culture in the Sunday-school, but stumbled over the book of Genesis and kindred difficulties, and was 'emancipated'. The loss of faith which, in certain conditions, is a terrible bereavement, was to him a blessed relief; when the God of the old-fashioned Sunday-school and the camp meeting ceases to terrify, he ordinarily becomes a deadly bore. Having never known the magnificent poetry of faith, he never felt the magnificent melancholy of unbelief. His experience was typical, however, and his very unspirituality was social. In his examination of Christian Science, he admitted that every man is entitled to his own favorite brand of insanity, and insisted that he

himself was as insane as anybody. That was enough to assure most of us that he was sound on 'all essentials'.

'Be good and you will be lonesome' is, I suppose, one of Mark Twain's most widely quoted utterances in the field of morals. At first thought, one may wonder why this apparently Bohemian apothegm should have taken such hold upon the heart of a nation which above all things else adores virtue. But the difficulty disappears the instant one reflects that these seven words express by implication precisely the kind and temper of virtue that the nation adores. Like Wilson's observation on the dog, the saying is cryptic and requires explication. Mark Twain tells us in his autobiography that when he was a boy his mother always allowed about thirty per cent. on what he said for 'embroidery' and so 'struck his average'. The saying means, as I take it, first of all, Don't lose your sense of humor as those do who become infatuated with their own particular hobbies in goodness. Calculate to keep about in the middle of the road, but make allowance for all reasonable shades of difference in taste and opinion. Don't be too good or you will find yourself in a barren and uninfluential minority of one. In America, whatever is not social is not virtue. Mark Twain seems to have felt that the New England Puritans were 'too good to be true'; that the American people could never get together on the high levels of New England spirituality. In his interesting series of dialogues, *What is Man?*, he reduces all the motives of human conduct to self-interest; but, like Benjamin Franklin, who sets out from a similar position, he reaches the conclusion

that an enlightened self-interest is not at war with the interests of others. 'Diligently train your ideals upward', he says, 'and still upward toward a summit where you will find your chiefest pleasure in conduct which, while contenting you, will be sure to confer benefits upon your neighbor and the community.' When he put his shoulder under the debts of his bankrupt publishing house, he took a clear stand on one of the essentials of a national 'code'. In his chivalric treatment of Joan of Arc and Harriet Shelley he showed the spirit animating another fundamental American tradition, which, it is to be hoped, our iconoclasts will not be able to destroy. Fond of strong language, careless of peccadilloes, tolerant of human frailties though he was, his feet were 'mortised and tenoned' in domestic rectitude and common morality.

Mark Twain does not give us much help toward realizing our best selves; but he is a rock of refuge when the ordinary self—'the divine average'—is in danger. As some one has said, 'We cannot live always on the cold heights of the sublime—the thin air stifles'. We cannot flush always with the high ardor of the signers of the Declaration, nor remain at the level of the address at Gettysburg, nor cry continually, 'O Beautiful! My country!' Yet, in the long dull interspaces between these sacred moments we need some one to remind us that we are a nation. For in the dead vast and middle of the years insidious foes are stirring—anaemic refinements, cosmopolitan decadencies, Teutonic heresies, imperial lusts, fraud and corruption, the cold sickening of the heart at reiterated expressions of unfaith in the outcome of the democratic ex-

periment. When our countrymen migrate because we have no kings or castles, we are thankful to any one who will tell us what we can count on. When they complain that our soil lacks the humanity essential to great literature, we are grateful even for the firing of a national joke heard round the world. And when Mark Twain, robust, big-hearted, gifted with the divine power to use words, makes us all laugh together, builds true romances with prairie fire and Western clay, and shows us that we are at one on all the main points, we feel that he has been appointed by Providence to see to it that the precious ordinary self of the Republic shall suffer no harm.

VAN WYCK BROOKS

1886–

'OUR POETS'[1] (1915)

I

It is a principle that shines impartially on the just and on the unjust that once you have a point of view all history will back you up. Everything no doubt depends upon evidence; and considering the case which has been outlined in the last chapter, an appeal to American literature, if literature really does record the spirit of a people, is an appeal that leads, I think, to evidence of a material sort.

Something, in American literature, has always been wanting—every one, I think, feels that. Aside from the question of talent, there is not, excepting Walt Whitman, one American writer who comes home to a modern American with that deep, moving, shaking impact of personality for which one turns to the abiding poets and writers of the world. A certain density, weight, and richness, a certain poignancy, a 'something far more deeply interfused', simply is not there.

Above all, the Americanism of our old writers appears to have had no faculty of development and adaptation. With the death of Emerson, Lowell, Holmes and their group something in the American mind really did come to an end. The generation which has gone by since then is a generation which

[1] From *America's Coming-of-Age*. New York: The Viking Press. Copyright by B. W. Huebsch, 1915.

has produced no indisputable leader of thought and letters, which has destroyed the coherence of the old American circle of ideas, and left us at the height of the second immigration among the chaotic raw materials of a perhaps altogether new attitude of mind.

It is, in fact, the plain, fresh, homely, impertinent, essentially innocent old America that has passed; and in its passing the allegory of Rip Van Winkle has been filled with a new meaning. Hendrik Hudson and his men, we see, have begun another game of bowls, and the reverberations are heard in many a summer thunderstorm; but they have been miraculously changed into Jews, Lithuanians, Magyars, and German socialists. Rip is that old innocent America which has fallen asleep and which hears and sees in a dream the movement of peoples, the thunder of alien wants. And when after twenty years he awakens again, stretches his cold rheumatic limbs, and discovers the long white beard, he will once more set out for home; but when he arrives will he be recognized?

What emotions pass through an hereditary American when he calls to mind the worthies who figured in that ubiquitous long paneled group of 'Our Poets' which occupied once so prominent a place in so many domestic interiors? Our Poets were commonly six in number, kindly, gray-bearded, or otherwise grizzled old men. One recalls a prevailing six, with variations. Sometimes a venerable historian was included, a novelist or so, and even Bayard Taylor.

Nothing could make one feel so like a prodigal son as to look at the picture. So much for the first

glance, the first quick impression after one has come home to it from the far wanderings of an ordinary profane existence. But more complicated emotions supervene. What a world within a world that picture summons up! Frankly, we feel in ourselves, we are no longer so fortunate as in those days. It could really have been said of us then, as it cannot now be said at all, that as a folk we had won a certain coherence, a certain sort of ripeness in the better part of ourselves, which was reflected in the coherence of our men of letters. Whittier, for example, was a common basis, and a very sweet and elevating basis, for a national programme of emotions the like of which no poet since his time has been able to compass. One recalls that fact, so full of meaning; and then, deep down, a forgotten world sweeps back over one, a world of memory, sentiment, and association, a world of influences the most benign—like a mournful autumn wind stirring in forsaken places. . . . But sooner or later the ordinary profane existence reasserts itself; and we have to put it to ourselves with equal frankness—has any one of these men, or any one of these influences, the power at bottom to make it any less profane? The most beautiful and benign sentiment in the world will not do so unless it has in it that which grips in some way at the root of personality. . . . Then it is we feel how inadequate, faded, and out of touch they are.

It is of no use to go off into a corner with American literature, as most of the historians have done, —in a sulky, private sort of way, taking it for granted that if we give up world values we are entitled to our own little domestic rights and

wrongs, criticism being out of place by the fireside. 'But oh, wherever else I am accounted dull,' wrote Cowper in one of his letters, 'let me pass for a genius at Olney.' This is the method of the old-fashioned camp in American criticism, just as the method of the contemporary camp is the method of depreciative comparison with better folk than our own.

The only fruitful approach is the personal approach, and to me at least Thoreau, Emerson, Poe, and Hawthorne are possessions for ever. This does not alter the fact that if my soul were set on the accumulation of dollars not one of them would have the power to move me from it. And this I take to be a suggestive fact. Not one of them, not all of them, have had the power to move the soul of America from the accumulation of dollars; and when one has said this one has arrived at some sort of basis for literary criticism.

Plainly enough, during what has been called the classical period of American literature, the soul of America did not want to be moved from the accumulation of dollars; plainly enough the pioneering instinct of economic self-assertion was the law of the tribe. And if the New England writers were homogeneous with the American people as no other group, scarcely any other individual, has been since, it is equally plain that they themselves and all their works must have accorded with the law of the tribe. The immense, vague cloud-canopy of idealism which hung over the American people during the nineteenth century was never permitted, in fact, to interfere with the practical conduct of life.

Never permitted, I say, though it is a more

accurate explanation that, being essentially impersonal itself, the essence of this idealism lay in the very fact that it had and could have no connection with the practical conduct of life. The most successful and famous writers, Bryant and Longfellow, for example, promoted this idealism, being, so far as one can see, generally satisfied with the ordinary practices of society: they tacitly accepted the peculiar dualism that lies at the root of our national point of view. Emerson's really equivocal individualism on the one hand asserted the freedom and self-reliance of the spirit and on the other justified the unlimited private expediency of the business man. And as a suggestive corollary to all this, the two principal artists in American literature, Poe and Hawthorne, were out of touch with society as few other artists in the world had been before: to their contemporaries they seemed spectral and aloof, scarcely human, and it could easily be shown that the reaction upon their work of a world to them essentially unreal is equally marked.

Granting these facts, and granting the still more significant fact of the absence from our literature of that deep, moving, shaking impact of personality which would have brought it into more permanent touch with American life, I do not see how we can escape the general axiom: that a society whose end is impersonal and anti-social cannot produce an ideal reflex in literature which is personal and social, and, conversely, that the ideal reflex in literature by such a society will be unable to educate its own personal and social instincts. In effect, an examination of American literature will show, I think, that those of our writers who have

possessed a vivid personal genius have been paralyzed by the want of a social background, while those who have possessed a vivid social genius have been equally unable to develop their own personalities.

II

And here at the outset a distinction must be drawn between what may be called the literature of necessity and absolute literature. It is perfectly plain that in one aspect literature is a simple cog in the machinery of life. The first generation of American writers were like prudent women who, having moved into a new house, energetically set to work laying down carpets, papering the walls, cutting and hanging the most appropriate window-curtains, and pruning the garden—making it, in short, a place of reasonable charm and contentment.

Than Washington Irving, for example, no one was ever more satisfied with things as they are; prosperity in others aroused in him the most benignant emotions, and there is a description by him of a smiling river farm with its fat hens and waddling pigs which rises to a sort of placid ecstasy —in recollection one confuses the pigs with little cherubim, and as to the farm itself one wonders why (or indeed whether) angels have not settled there.

The effect of this idyllic treatment is precisely that of the first warm blaze in a newly constructed hearth. It takes away the sense of chill; the room becomes at once cozy and cheerful, and we enjoy the prospect of spending an evening in it.

That is at least a principal element in the work or Irving, Cooper, Bryant, and Longfellow. When

these men ceased writing, the towns, the woods, the wild-flowers, even the bare and meagre history of America were clothed with memories and associations. It was possible to feel them all, and even to muse upon them. The characters of Cooper lighted up a little fringe of the black uncut forest; they linked the wilderness with our own immemorial human world, just as the little figures Piranesi put in his engravings not only give the scale of his Roman ruins and relate them to the observer's eye but also arouse the sense of historical connections, the sense of pathos and of man's destiny.

When they wrote of Europe their essential motive was the same as when they wrote of America. Irving's English essays at bottom, as he himself declares, were deliberately intended to place England and America on a basis of mutual good will—a motive, in the proper sense, political. Longfellow never forgot in Europe that he was on leave of absence, and that in gathering specimens he was to bear in mind the soil to which they were to be transplanted. There was nothing in heaven or earth he was not able to prune and fertilize into harmony with the New England temperature; and who will deny that he in turn altered that temperature, warmed and gladdened it,—that he came back as a kind of gulf stream to our frost-bitten civilization, which has been kindlier ever since?

III

But out of this essential motive of the first gene ration of American writers a second motive arises. They were moralists, they were shot through and through with all manner of baccalaureate ideals;

and this fact opens them to a different sort of treatment. For this let Longfellow and Bryant suffice, for they are typical.

Longfellow is to poetry what the barrel-organ is to music; approached critically he simply runs on, and there is an end to the matter. But nobody dreams of criticising Longfellow from the point of view of 'mere literature': the human head and the human heart alike revolt from that. His personal sanction is rightly a traditional one, and the important thing is to see him as a beautifully typical figure and to see just what he typifies.

To Longfellow the world was a German picture-book, never detaching itself from the softly colored pages. He was a man of one continuous mood: it was that of a flaxenhaired German student on his *wanderjahr* along the Rhine, under the autumn sun —a sort of expurgated German student—ambling among ruined castles and reddening vines, and summoning up a thousand bright remnants of an always musical past. His was an eminently Teutonic nature of the old school, a pale-blue melting nature; and white hair and grandchildren still found him with all the confused emotion, the charming sadness, the indefinite high proposals of seventeen;—perhaps it was because they had never been opposed, never put to the test in that so innocently successful existence of his, that they persisted without one touch of disillusion, one moment of chagrin.

But frankly what preparation is a life like this for the poet whose work it is to revivify a people? The most telling thing I know about Longfellow is that, having remarked that 'Carlyle was one of those

men who sacrifice their happiness to their work', he himself was well content in later life to surrender the greater part of his time and energies to writing autographs and entertaining children. Here certainly the personal sanction oversteps the mark, just as it does in the case of indulgent politicians who exhibit their gratitude and warm-heartedness by feathering the nests of all their friends and cousins. Though Longfellow had an unerring eye for the 'practical application' that lurks in every shred of romance, totally unable to elude the agile moralist, the value of his moral promptings is just in proportion to the pressure behind them—and where was the pressure? His morals and ideals were, in fact, simply a part of the pretty picture-book, just as they are at seventeen: if they had not been so they would never have been laid on the shelf.

But the 'practical application' cannot be dismissed in this way; and if the personal sanction is disarming in relation to Longfellow, the case is otherwise with Bryant, a virile, hard-headed man, whose memory can afford many a blow. To Bryant the moral ending was no half absent-minded flourish of the color brush—it was a tough Puritan reality; and Bryant's use of the moral ending is emblematic not merely, as in Longfellow's case, of the vacuity and impermanence of so much American idealism, but also of the corollary of these—the failure of Americans in general to develop and express their personality in and through their work.

Bluntly, the use of a moral ending means that the poet is unwilling to leave his effect to the emotion conveyed in the poem itself; he must needs intellectualize this emotion at the close, and

show you that this emotion is only used, like cheese in a mouse-trap, to entice the reader into a usually disagreeable fact, for which the whole exists. Now this procedure is full of meaning. For not the emotion, not the expression of personality, but the ulterior object is the essential issue in the mind of the poet: not life, but success, or salvation. And the same principle operates here, and renders the result equally barren, as in work which is done mainly for the ulterior object of making money, in religion which exists merely for the ulterior object of saving one's soul, in thought which exists merely for the ulterior object of proving something. The excellence and fruitfulness of anything consists in our loving and enjoying it, in our expressing our personality through it. Real poetry springs from the assumption that the spectacle is its own reward, that feeling, happy or unhappy, is final: it is concerned, as Shelley pointed out, not with effects and applications, which are temporary, but with causes, which are permanent. The moral ending is simply a rigid and impersonal intellectualization of life, which is, consequently, out of touch with the motives that really determine men.

For this reason Bryant was never a personality; he was, to be exact, a somewhat eminent personage. After his eighteenth year he was miraculously changed, not into stone, but into wood,—he was as bald, as plain, as immovable, so to say, as an old settee. He had no elasticity, no sense of play either in words, ideas, or emotions; two or three poetic forms sufficed him; even as a journalist he was abstract. One sees him during sixty years perambulating Broadway with that old blue cotton

umbrella of his, the very picture of a spare old Puritan patriarch, with his big muscular joints, a hardy perennial. And all about him one sees that spry, flimsy New York of the forties and fifties and sixties—the New York of 'Nothing to Wear' and N. P. Willis. It is these gulfs of contrast which let one into the secret of American humor.

Yes, this old man with his palsied gift, who had for two generations been pursued by glimpses of the grave but who had embalmed within him an incomparable vigor and who, past eighty, put Homer into English—this old man is himself Homeric (with a difference) amid that spawn of decadent Byronism which made up the so-called Knickerbocker school. New York has never possessed dignity—one loves the many-headed beast for a thousand other reasons than that; but it has achieved a sort of Napoleonic right to despise dignity, and it has come to possess its secrets. In the thirties and forties it possessed no secrets at all—it was the centre of an ingenuous America which had only just learned to be worldly, which the lightest zephyr from London or Paris set fluttering, over which every ripple of fashion broke into a spray of tinsel.

IV

So much is necessary to give Poe what he badly needs, a naturalistic setting: Poe himself, who emerges from this New York of his time like a wreck at sea with its black spars etched against a sort of theatrical sunset. Ironical and sinister as he is, he is by no means 'out of space, out of time', if by space we mean New York and by time the

second quarter of the nineteenth century. The little imitation Byrons who swarmed about him wrote of haunted Gothic castles, Poe wrote the *House of Usher*; Bianca, Giordano, Ermengarde, Elfrida, Asthene, Zophiel were the human properties of their prose and verse, scarcely to be distinguished from the Madeleines and Eleanores, the Eulalies and Annabels, the Israfels and Al Aaraafs of Poe; they also lived in a world of moan and a world of moonlight; madness, irreparable farewells, dungeons, assignations, premature burials, hidden treasures, exotic musical instruments, prophetic night birds—these things were of the time and very particularly, since New York provided them with an additional unreality, of the place.

Poe took this bric-à-brac seriously—that is always a distinction and it is Poe's distinction. The tacit conventionalities of the romantic epoch became in him objects of a fierce intellectual concentration. In the comfortable safety of good and abundant food, friendly talk, substantial occupation, his contemporaries amused themselves with spectres, Oriental mysteries, hasheesh, and madness: Poe was the delirium which followed. He was a Byron without scope of action and without purging emotions.

Superficially at least he was not conscious of being out of his element. In those critical essays in which he is so accessible and so honest and has so many disagreeable things to say about his contemporaries it is never the false taste, never the epoch which displeases him. He likes *The Dying Rosebud's Lament* by Mrs. Fanny Osgood; what irritates him is bad grammer, bad rhymes, and plagiarism. Nor is there the least indication that

he thought America provincial, or bourgeois, or depressing to a man of talent. That indeed is an element in the strength of all the American writers of the old school; an instinct of self-preservation kept them at home in spirit; so much of the missionary element was of the texture of what they had to say that a tinge of the cosmopolitan would have neutralized their best effects, would have rendered them personally, as it has certainly rendered Lowell, a little characterless, a little indistinct. But it is a rather disconcerting fact in relation to the theory that Poe is a kind of supersensual enigma, who might have lived with equal results in Babylon or Sioux City. At his second-best, in prose and verse, he is precisely at one, both in tone and execution, with his intellectual surroundings. At his best it is this outworn bric-à-brac which is transfigured, just as the suburban bibliolatry of England is transfigured in the drawings of Blake. The important thing is to consider what this bric-à-brac is transfigured into, and why, and what it means.

Since the days of the alchemists no one has produced more than Poe the effects of damnation, no one has been more conscious of being damned. In his pages the breath of life never stirs: crimes occur which do not reverberate in the human conscience, there is laughter which has no sound, there is weeping without tears, there is beauty without love, there is love without children, trees grow which bear no fruit, flowers which have no fragrance,—it is a silent world, cold, blasted, moon-struck, sterile, a devil's heath. Only a sensation of intolerable remorse pervades it.

Poe is commonly called unreal; it is justly said of him that he never touches the general heart of man, that perhaps of all writers who have lived he has the least connection with human experience. Nothing is more sinister about Poe, for instance, than his tacit acceptance of common morals; you might even say that he is rigidly conventional, if you did not feel that he is conventional merely because the moral world no more exists for him than it exists for a black stone. If you could prove a vicious motive in him, as from certain points of view you can prove a vicious motive in Baudelaire, you might, even in that, establish some fusion between him and the common reason of humankind. Orchids are as much a part of the vegetable kingdom as potatoes, but Poe is an orchid made out of chemicals. Magic is always so; it has the sinister quality of a force operating outside nature, without any relation to human values.

No European can exist without a thousand subterranean relationships; but Americans can so exist, Americans do so exist. Edison, for example, resembles Poe as a purely inventive mathematical intellect, and with Edison, as with Poe, you feel that some electric fluid takes the place of blood; you feel that the greatest of inventors cannot be called a scientist at all, that his amazing powers over nature are not based in any philosophical grasp of the laws of nature, that he is in temperament a mechanic rather than a philosopher. His faculty is to that of Darwin, for example, what fish is to flesh,—to the philosophical animal man he is more incomprehensible; and for all the beneficence of his faculty he is himself a kind

of prodigious salamander. Poe is a mechanic of the same sort. He has discovered in literature the chemical secret of life. He has produced chemical men, chemical emotions, chemical landscapes; in *Eureka* he has produced even a chemical philosophy so much like real philosophy that until you try to feel it you will never guess it the most sterile of illusions. For this reason the highly colored effects that light up his tales and his poems are lurid and metallic. The sinister greens and reds and yellows are not, you feel, the flames of honest wood and coal.

To explain all this it is not enough to say that he had a spectral nature, that Emerson and Jonathan Edwards and Hawthorne had spectral natures, that theosophy and Christian Science suggest that this quality is a typical American quality. So much is probably true, but more is required; and to approach Poe is to approach those mysteriously fascinating thaumaturgic elements in nature which are responsible for most of the fraudulent science in the world. One treads warily on the outer edges of psychology, and I suppose it is not accurately known what forces of the mind were involved in mediaeval witchcraft, in alchemy, in the conception of Mephistopheles. But certainly to the Middle Ages the intelligence in and for itself was felt to be a maleficent force: Mephistopheles himself in the old legends is nothing other than pure intellect, irresponsible and operating independently of life. Necessarily therefore to him faith, love, and hope are illusions, and he is the negation of the soul. Above all, it is the secret of creating life for which in the mediaeval imagination souls were bartered to the devil: one obtained the power of competing

with God at the price of a perpetual consciousness of one's own damnation. These are dark ways; but one emerges into the region of knowledge when one affirms that, by their mental twist, witches and alchemists were not convicted by society any more than they were convicted in themselves of having done the unpardonable and the irreparable. And certain it is that Poe experienced in his own imagination this power and this damnation. His haunted face, his driven life, the barren world which he has built and peopled, the horror of his accustomed mood, the inextinguishable obscure remorse that broods in him unite in this fact.

The power he still exerts is an hysterical rather than a literary power, and who can say what it signifies? But one thing seems true, with regard alike to witchcraft, alchemy, and Poe, that the mind can work healthily only when it is essentially in touch with the society of its own age. No matter into what unknown region it presses, it must have a point of relativity in the common reason of its time and place. Poe, having nothing in common with the world that produced him, constructed a little parallel world of his own, withered at the core, a silent comment. It is this that makes him so sterile and so inhuman; and he is himself, conversely, the most menacing indictment of a society which is not also an all-embracing organism.

V.

Poe and Hawthorne, certainly, were much more of a common stock in temperament than the New York and New England of their time: the temperament which in Poe is at once vulgarized by vulgar

circumstances and pressed up into the intellect is diffused in the character and work of Hawthorne; the harsher lights are neutralized, the familiar world reappears again—but is it the familiar world? Hawthorne's talent is like a phosphorescent pool; you touch it, you move your hand there and a thousand subdued elusive lights dance through it, but before you can fix your eye upon one it has retreated through the clear water, the still depths that in effect are so impenetrable.

No other talent is of so shining a purity as Hawthorne's,—scarcely one other so light, so inevitable, so refined, so much a perfectly achieved intention. He models in mist as the Greeks modeled in marble; his beings take shape in the imagination with a sunlit perfection, but only for a moment; they melt and pass; the air is filled with a phantasmagorical movement of shapes, grouping themselves, putting on corporeality as a garment and at the same time dissolving into the nebulous background. It is a cloud pageant and the clouds are of opal dust. The Puritan conscience in Hawthorne is like some useful but inartistic Roman vessel of glass which has been buried for centuries in the earth and which comes forth at last fragile as a dragon-fly's wing, shot through with all the most exquisite colors. He is the most opalescent of writers, and each of his books is an opal of a different type: crimson, purple, and emerald cross and recross *The Marble Faun*, and all the most fleeting tints of pale yellow, pale green, and pearly white shimmer through the *Blithedale Romance*, with a single strain of tragic red passing athwart it in the character of Zenobia. A hundred times the world of Hawthorne seems the familiar

world, but just as we imagine we have gained a foothold there a wand passes over it, a wall is removed behind it,—it has become a world within a world.

This leads one almost to forget that Hawthorne's range is limited, that his gift is meagre and a little anaemic, that his poetry is not quite the same thing as wisdom. For if like the greatest poets he sees life as a fable, with a fable's infinitely multiplied correspondences, he feels it rather as a phantom than as a man. This being who passed twelve years of his youth in a solitary, close-curtained room, walking abroad only in the twilight or after the sun had set, was himself a phantom in a phantom world. Observe how he treats any one of his typical characters, the elfish little Priscilla, for example. He is describing the rumors current among her neighbors and how they believed that 'the sun, at midday, would shine through her; in the first gray of the twilight, she lost all the distinctness of her outline; and, if you followed the dim thing into a dark corner, behold, she was not there'. And he goes on in his own person: 'There was a lack of human substance in her; it seemed as if, were she to stand up in a sunbeam, it would pass right through her figure, and trace out the cracked and dusty window-panes upon the naked floor.' Could anything be more exquisite? Could anything more entirely fail to connect with reality in a practical Yankee world?

It is the natural corollary of all this that Hawthorne himself, as a social being (in his opinions especially—for he did not abstain from opinions), was more than commonly conventional. It is

natural that this most deeply planted of American writers, who indicates more than any other the subterranean history of the American character, should have recoiled from every attempt to change, rectify, or spiritualize society; that he should have been incurious of every forward-looking impulse, a rather more than indifferent anti-abolitionist, a much more than indifferent anti-Transcendentalist, and, though actively concerned with politics in one way or another through his middle and later years, always on the uninteresting side. His talent was a kind of Prospero's isle quite outside the world he lived in. It was *kept* outside that world by his own infallible instinct of artistic self-preservation. The comment he puts into the mouth of Miles Coverdale *à propos* of the 'philanthropist' Hollingsworth is really his own comment on the society in which he found himself: 'The moral which presents itself to my reflections, as drawn from Hollingsworth's character and errors, is simply this,—that admitting what is called philanthropy, when adopted as a profession, to be often useful by its energetic impulse to society at large, it is perilous to the individual whose ruling passion, in one exclusive channel, it thus becomes. It ruins, or is fearfully apt to ruin, the heart, the rich juices of which God never meant should be pressed violently out, and distilled into alcoholic liquor, by an unnatural process, but should render life sweet, bland, and gently beneficent, and insensibly influence other hearts and other lives to the same blessed end.'

Hawthorne was right with regard to the society of his day, but consider what he lost and what we

have lost by it. It is not the business of an artist as such to change society, and if Hawthorne held aloof from everything that stood for movement in his time that was the price of being sensitively organized in an age of rude, vague, boisterous, dyspeptic, incoherent causes. The fact that Hawthorne and Poe were the only two eminent minds of their age to which Transcendentalism was profoundly repugnant is the surest proof that they alone possessed the full and the right artistic instinct. They had to do what they could in society as it was—and what happened? Outwardly accepting it, but having nothing in common with it, they neither enriched society nor were enriched by it; they were driven to create and inhabit worlds of their own,—diaphanous private worlds of mist and twilight.

VI

I find it impossible to approach the question of Transcendentalism—the thing itself, and Emerson, Margaret Fuller, the Dial, Brook Farm, and all the other permutations and combinations of it—without first of all expelling a persistent spleen, and then submitting myself to long explanations. So much truth, so much talent, so much of the American character is involved in that queer miasmatical group of lunar phenomena, in which philosophy, self-culture, politics, art, social reform, and religion were all mixed up and all felt to be, in some vague way, the same thing. One angel no doubt can stand quite comfortably on the point of a pin, but when a whole battalion of angels attempt to occupy this identical space there is war in heaven.

It is plain enough that the Transcendentalists

had no sense of the relationship that exists between theory and practice, between the abstract and the concrete. The world they lived in was an excessively concrete world—a world of isolated facts. The white wooden houses, the farms, the patches of wood, the self-contained villages, each with its town-meeting, the politician, the minister, the lawyer, the merchant, were, in fact, very much what Emerson called his own sentences, 'infinitely repellent particles'; they had, relatively speaking, nothing in common but the Yankee temperament —and the quality of this common temperament was to be as *un*-common, as individual and as different, as possible. There was no fusion, no operative background of social forces, no unwritten laws. The experience of New England was an experience of two extremes—bare facts and metaphysics: the machinery of self-preservation and the mystery of life. Experience of the world, of society, of art, the genial middle ground of human tradition, existed only as an appetite. Painting, sculpture, architecture were represented by engravings; history, travel, world-politics, great affairs in general were represented by books. The habit of looking at things in the abstract, native to the old Calvinistic temper, was extended over the range of social and intellectual interests, partly as a result of isolation, partly because of the highly tenuous connection between these interests and the primitive actualities of life as New Englanders knew it.

German philosophy when it was released over the world inevitably came to port in this society, for above everything else it appeared to let one into the secret of universal experience. If, under

the influence of this philosophy, you sat up late enough at night you could be an Alexander, a Plato, a Raphael, or (in Boston) a Washington Allston, without moving out of your chair. It is true you gained no territory and painted no pictures by this method, but you at least placed yourself at the seat of operations where all these wonderful things occur.

This accounts for the peculiar flavor of that old New England culture, so dry, so crisp, so dogmatic, so irritating. Having entered wholly through the brain in the form of general propositions, without any checking from observation or experience, it seems curiously inverted, curiously unreal. Witness for example that strange far-away tone in which Emerson so often and so characteristically refers to 'Plato and Paul and Plutarch, Augustine, Spinoza, Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher', or 'the remains of Phidias, the Apollo, the Jove, the paintings and statues of Michael Angelo, the works of Canova'. There would be something quite ludicrous in this glimpse of St. Paul, Fletcher, Phidias and Spinoza arm in arm if you felt that Emerson had ever realistically pictured to himself these men as they individually were. To him they were all thrice-purified ghosts, ghosts of the printed page; the associations of the tavern, the synagogue, the drawing-room had fallen from their spirits in the mind of Emerson as utterly as from their bodies in the grave. To him they were exceptionally fine manifestations of the Over-Soul; philosophy like death had leveled them and had, as entirely, removed them from the region of terrestrial society, literature, and art. So also in effect when Margaret

Fuller comes to the conclusion that 'color is consecrate to passion and sculpture to thought'. Having thus as it were removed the whole question to another planet, she is able to present us further with a jewel of criticism like this: 'The Prophets and Sibyls are for the Michael Angelos. The Beautiful is Mr. Allston's dominion' (statements which make one feel a thousand years old). Yet this result is inevitable when works of art are approached not through the eye but through the mind: the element of taste, the perceptions of sense, once laid aside, there is no gulf between Phidias and Canova, between Michael Angelo and Washington Allston.

And then consider Emerson's style,—that strange fine ventriloquism, that attenuated voice coming from a great distance, which so often strikes one as a continual falsetto. If it is extremely irritating —and I have known amiable and well-disposed persons to be exasperated by it,—if it is filled with assertions that fairly insist upon being contradicted, it is because so often Emerson is abstract at the wrong times and concrete at the wrong times, because he has so little natural sense of the relation between the abstract and the concrete. Take, for instance, a typical sentence like this: 'Archimedes will look through your Connecticut machine, at a glance, and judge of its fitness'—to which the inevitable reply is, that Archimedes will do nothing of the kind: I no more possess a Connecticut machine than Archimedes will put on mortality again to look through it. Is it unfair to literalize these metaphorical affirmations of Emerson? Of course I understand that to him 'Archimedes' is

merely a name for that particular aspect of the Over-Soul which broods over machinery, while my 'Connecticut machine' means any human device that will serve to exhibit its powers of divination. But a prose which violates the actual overmuch, a prose in which the poetic effect is more than a heightened version of the actual is, I think, a prose one is entitled to find irritating. And furthermore his method of simply announcing as axiomatic what is in his mind is justified only by the possession of a faculty which Emerson does not possess, the faculty of hitting the nail inevitably on the head. Let one example suffice: 'Shelley, though a poetic mind, is never a poet. His muse is uniformly imitative; all his poems composite. A good English scholar he is, with ear, taste, and memory; much more, he is a character full of noble and prophetic traits; but imagination, the original, authentic fire of the bard, he has not.' Does this really suggest Shelley?

Emerson's artistic impressions are always of this hit-or-miss character; he can write page after page about a painter or a poet without one intelligibly apt utterance. Much the same is true of Carlyle and Ruskin, and for the same reason, that alike they all refer art to an extra-artistic standard. But Carlyle and Ruskin are concrete enough in their own wilful ways, while Emerson is persistently abstract. He never lingers in the bodily world, he is always busy to be off again; and if he takes two or three paces on the earth they only serve to warm him for a fresh aërial adventure. Thus the essay on *Illusions* opens with an account of a day spent in the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky, and after the

second sentence he continues in this way: 'I lost the light of one day. I saw high domes, and bottomless pits; heard the voice of unseen waterfalls,' &c. That is not the tone of descriptive writing; a glamour like that of oratory has fallen over it; phrase by phrase the effect is heightened and generalized under the reader's eye; we see how impatient he is to get to the real business and that the experience is already dimmed and evaporated by the approaching application.

The truth is that Emerson was not interested in human life; he cared nothing for experience or emotion, possessing so little himself. 'He generally addressed me as if I were wholly impersonal,' writes one of his disciples, who records an observation of Emerson that he 'could never turn a dozen pages of *Don Quixote* or Dickens without a yawn'. This accounts for the way in which his thoughts inevitably flew for refuge to capital letters, emerging as Demonology, Creeds, Prudence, the Ideal, abstractions all. His point of view was formed very early; all his later books are sprouts from the first one, and there is no indication of growth, imbibition, or excursiveness beyond his original boundaries. If he remained open he was open as it were at the top; and before he was thirty-five he seems to have acquired that fixed, benignant, musing smile which implies the consciousness of having solved one's own problem and which is usually accompanied by a closure of the five senses.

I say all this without prejudice to Emerson's position in the world of the spirit. There he truly lived and lives, and of all American writers he alone appears to me to have proved the reality of

that world and to have given some kind of basis to American idealism.

But Emerson's idealism was double-edged: it was concerned not merely with the spiritual life of the individual, but also with the individual in society, with the 'conduct of life'. This latter aspect of his teaching was in fact the secret of his contemporary influence. For if the logical result of a thorough-going, self-reliant individualism in the world of the spirit is to become a saint, it is no less true that the logical result of a thorough-going, self-reliant individualism in the world of the flesh is to become a millionaire. And in fact it would be hard to say whether Emerson more keenly relished saintliness or shrewdness. Both qualities he himself possessed in a high degree, as only an American can; and if on one side of his nature he was a most lonely and beautiful seer, the records of his life prove that he lacked none of the sagacity and caution of the true Yankee husbandman. He perfectly combined the temperaments of Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin;—the upper and lower levels of the American mind are fused in him and each becomes the sanction of the other.

In the long run there is a world of difference between individualism on the spiritual plane and individualism on the economic plane. Were it not so there would be no meaning in the phrase 'Stone walls do not a prison make', there would be no meaning in Christianity. And therein consists the beauty and the permanence of Emersonianism. For as the scope of enterprise and self-reliance becomes with every generation more limited, as the generality of men are caught with both feet in the net of

economic necessity and are led thereby to seek scope for their initiative in disinterested activity, just so the Emersonian doctrine comes into its own, the Emersonian virtues mount upward and create a self-reliance in the spirit itself. Emersonianism, in short, can only begin to be itself when it has taken its final place on the plane of poetry. In the nineteenth century it was economic as well; it was the voice of just those forces which moved, enlarged, created the American scene; it corresponded to a real freedom of movement and opportunity; pioneers, inventors, men of business, engineers, seekers of adventure found themselves expressed and justified in it. Emerson presided over and gave its tone to this world of infinite social fragmentation and unlimited free will, a world in which —as the presupposition was—every one started fresh, as if dropped from the sky, where entanglements of heredity and disposition, foreclosures of opportunity, desires and aims which require an already fertilized field for their development, where the whole welter of human history and social complexity had not yet as it were obscured the morning of time.

In all this Emerson was essentially passive. He was the child of his age, and what he did was to give his Yankee instincts free play under the sanction of his Transcendental idealism. He never dreamed of moulding society, and he was incapable of an effective social ideal. Compare him in this respect with Carlyle. The social ideal of Carlyle was the Hero, and what Carlyle meant by the Hero was a particular kind of being whom all Englishmen understand: a creature of flesh and blood who leads

men. No doubt Carlyle was absurd enough; but what made him nevertheless a mighty man was that he had the faculty of devising and making intensely real and contagious a social ideal the rudiments of which actually existed in the people he was addressing. The English admire heroism; Carlyle made the Hero a conscious and palpable objective; and his countrymen were stirred through and through. Carlyle counts his disciples from generation to generation; strong men and leaders of men, they go out conquering and ruling creation, and there is hardly a British governor who does not feel the apostolic hands of Carlyle upon his head. Preposterous no doubt they are, having so little of the science and humility that are proper to our late-sprung arboreal species. But who will deny that the doctrine itself has served to make them good human material—for a better doctrine?

What can Emerson show as a social ideal? *Representative Men.* Emerson has chosen six names, five of which are the names of writers, the sixth that of a man of action, Napoleon, whom, let us hope, Young America will not too closely emulate. The social ideal of Emerson, as Froude pointed out, is a sort of composite of the philosopher, the mystic, the sceptic, the poet, the writer, and the man of the world. I wonder what passed through the mind of the American business man of Emerson's day when he heard all these phrases, phrases so unrelated to the springs of action within himself? Did he feel that his profound instincts had been touched and unified, did he see opening before him the line of a disinterested career, lighted up by a sudden dramatization of his own finest latent pos-

sibilities, did he not rather, with a degree of reason, say to himself: 'These papers will serve very well to improve my mind. I shall read them when I have time'? And did he not thereupon set to work accumulating all the more dollars in order that he might have the more time to cultivate his mind—in legal phrase—after the event?

Looked at from this side, Emerson has all the qualities of the typical baccalaureate sermon; and the baccalaureate sermon, as we know, beautiful as it often is, has never been found inconveniently inconsistent with the facts and requirements of business life. A glance at Young America after so many generations of being talked to might well convince one that something is wrong with the baccalaureate sermon. Since the day of Emerson's address on 'The American Scholar' the whole of American literature has had the semblance of one vast, all-embracing baccalaureate sermon, addressed to the private virtues of young men. It has been one shining deluge of righteousness, purity, practical mysticism, the conduct of life, and at the end of ninety years the highest ambition of Young America is to be—do I exaggerate?—the owner of a shoe-factory. As a result of this exclusive approach through the personal conscience (a conscience by no means connected with disinterested ends and the real development of personality), society in America has permanently stood for two things: in its private aspect as an immense preserve for the exercise of personal virtues like thrift, self-assertion, family provision, nest-feathering in general; in its public aspect as a thing to be coddled with rich gifts (Philanthropy) or

scrubbed back to the political intentions of 1776 (Reform).

Emerson is the patron saint of every one of these diverse, chaotic impulses—the gentle, chime-like Emerson who in days to come will sound and shine over a better world.

VII

But since I have spoken of the disciples of Carlyle as arguing the force if not the validity of his social ideal I must add something about the disciples of Emerson, and the personal and social effects of Transcendentalism in American society.

George William Curtis I take to have been the typical Emersonian young man, and I am probably the only person of this generation who has read all his writings. This was the result of having taken a furnished house in California, very new and clean, with little idealistic mottoes hanging from every bracket. Great care had been given to the selection of artistic doorknobs and grass-plaited mats; the cupboards were stufied with albums of wild-flowers and with notebooks filled with nature poems of the minor sort and penciled observations always unfinished and in a vague, wavering hand. An aroma of delicate futility spread from this house, and while gradually becoming conscious of this I discovered everywhere, on the shelves, in the closets, under the albums, the works of George William Curtis: lives, letters, essays, sketches, eulogies, orations. He was plainly the favorite author of the establishment, and wherever one sat down for a moment there was George William Curtis at one's elbow.

A dozen or so types exhaust the range of a people,

and I have known several duplicates of our milder American Addison. In action he was admirable as a driver out of money-changers—the virginal candor of his type assured that. But he had that pale, earnest cast of mind which always comes from thinking more about what Sir Galahad didn't do than about the object of his quest; and in fact the philosophy of George William Curtis is the most mournful exhibition I know of the inner workings of the Reformer's mind. It is in his social criticism that he betrays the incurable boyishness, the superannuated boyishness of the Emersonian tradition in its main line of influence, and the quantity and quality of his understanding of society is fairly well summed up in his energetic though perfectly well-mannered invective against smoking cigarettes in the presence of ladies.

If Transcendentalism ran to seed in George William Curtis, what were its personal and social effects at the source? He would be an ungentle soul who did not feel a certain tenderness for the Brook Farmers, who did not wish that a really wicked world had been provided expressly for them to make over. New England was not wicked: it was only a very just expression of the Yankee temperament, and the reformers showed no disposition whatever to de-Yankeeize themselves. Their instincts were perfectly right; they rebelled against the sordidness of a world given over to economic self-assertion; but they did not recognize that in their day economic self-assertion was the law of the tribe, and that under those conditions the prettiest communism imaginable could be nothing better than group-assertion or moonshine. They

approached society through the abstract impulsion of German and French philosophy; having received this impulsion and being practical themselves they had to 'do something', and what they did was Brook Farm. Abolition was the one strictly social cause they supported, and the South had reason to know how abstract was the New England prosecution of that cause. Half the grotesque, pathetic, and charming futility of men like Bronson Alcott is due to the extraordinary amount of intellectual and moral machinery they set running, without real pressure and without real purpose. They were like high-minded weather-cocks on a windless day.

To Margaret Fuller one turns for the personal bearings of this malady. She sums up the whole story of Transcendentalism—its cause and its cure. For she was eminently caused by Transcendentalism and her unique distinction lies in having been cured of it. In her position as priestess of Boston, Margaret was a fount of this universal experience, engendered backwards as it were in the unadulterated brain. At sixteen we find her asking a correspondent whether she would rather be 'the brilliant de Staël or the useful Edgeworth'. She sleeps five hours and masters six languages. She reads herself sallow, blinks, and speaks through her nose. She is morbid, sarcastic, and suffers from incessant headache. Emerson, at first setting eyes on her, says to himself, 'We shall never get far.' At twenty-nine she begins her celebrated 'Conversations', choosing the Greek mythology as her theme because it is 'playful as well as deep'. One member of her class demurring at the idea that a Christian people can have anything to learn from

the religion of a heathen one, Margaret finds it very easy to dispose of this objection. At last in a perfect ecstasy of wrong-headedness she devotes four conversations to the subject of Venus considered as the type of Instinctive Womanhood: one fancies how she must have demolished that lady.

But what happened then? It has been the tradition in America to laugh at the first half of Margaret's story; it would have been wiser to pay more attention to the second half, which is a moral to every American idealist.

Margaret, who had always been conscious of possessing what she called the European mind, finally went to Europe. No sooner had she set foot on foreign soil than she began to thaw. Among statesmen, revolutions, sieges, human causes, in hospitals and prisons, this fantastic New England prodigy became serene, capable, commanding. And when, from the Roman military hospital of which she was superintendent during the siege of 1849 she writes home to Emerson, it is Emerson who appears the stiff and limited provincial and she the one that has known men and cities. And this is equally true of her writings. Hysterical in everything she had said of German philosophy, she writes of Cromwell like the wife of an ambassador, with justice, point, and sense, and she is equally just and pointed in her views of Mazzini, Carlyle, George Sand, and Garibaldi, once she has seen them, so to speak, in action. Along with all this she had the good sense to acquire a husband and a baby, two things which have the most salutary effect on Transcendental women.

What is the moral of all this? It is the moral and

the nemesis of all unattached idealism: that the more deeply and urgently and organically you feel the pressure of society the more deeply and consciously and fruitfully you feel and you become yourself.

VIII

This moral is reënforced quite specially by the case of James Russell Lowell.

Very little, it seems to me, is left of Lowell except the size of him. He was a sizeable man, he remains a sizable figure, but one that has curiously gone blank. He occupied a considerable space in the world, he became that interesting psychological fact, a Standard Poet, he has been used by the American people to stop the gap where a great critic ought to have been. What is wrong with him, what is missing in him, what has happened to him?

No American writer appears to have been so naturally gifted as Lowell. In his youth he was all animal spirits and impressionability, a sunny, easy nature with a local tang at bottom which gave edge to an otherwise too mellifluous talent. He rose easily and at once out of the provincial atmosphere which constrained all his contemporaries. The Transcendentalists, having sprung from Calvinism, were unable to approach art unless they could in some way justify themselves by making it an organ of religion; they sanctified it by placing it at arm's length and rendering it abstract. Lowell, singularly, was born without scruples of this kind; he read and wrote in a natural secular spirit, and his poems range pleasantly over the ranges of other poets, without effort and without missionary zeal,

in a substantial and cultivated way. His critical essays are similar: what distinguishes them is a quality that belongs not to the better sort of criticism in his own age, but to that of the age preceding it, the quality which Hazlitt called *gusto*—a spontaneous new-found relish in relishable things. He liked best the placid, unsuggestive, agreeably bovine writers like Dryden, and he called Shakespeare master. Why is it that Shakespeare is never the master of originating minds? Plato may be, or Dante, or Tolstoi, or one's uncle, or the village postmaster, but not Shakespeare. Conceive the discomfort of Shakespeare living had any one proclaimed himself a disciple. The ten-millionth Hindu is a more inevitable master; and certainly any one who requires a lesson of Shakespeare comes away with nothing but grace and good humor.

Yet one persists in feeling that Lowell's mental framework was on a large scale, that the framework was simply not filled in. Superficially he appears the most complete, the most perfectly fused American literary personality; in reality he suffered more than any other from the want of a suitable background and is the most unfulfilled of all. That is because his culture is European without the corresponding pressure and responsibility of the European mind. He was the contemporary of Matthew Arnold, of Ruskin, of Taine; in his representative character, in his vitality, he is of a stature equal to any of these; but where they have ideals and passions he remains the genial ambassador. The truth is that Lowell had no ideas, or rather what he had were dummy ideas like democracy and patriotism, which in common usage mean nothing but which

enable the mind to go round and round in a large kind of way without involving the difficult intellectual act of clinching something. He paid the penalty of detaching himself from the ethical idea, which alone in its various ramifications has been able to make the New England temperament an interesting one, by being unable to arrive at any other.

For this he was not by any means to blame. The individual responds to the pressure exerted upon him; his epoch, his race, his social background, determine the character of this pressure. Ideas rarely exist, and when they exist they never come to fruition, except as representative of forces lying behind the individual which press and focus the individual and make him the mouthpiece of something greater, deeper, wider than himself. The real forces of American life during the nineteenth century were forces to which Lowell was not fitted to respond; they were individualistic, ethical, and spiritual—they were, in a word, Emersonian. The strength of Emersonianism in its own time lay in its being a genuine response to an economic situation, an answering pressure, a justification of universally experienced needs and impulses. And what is true of Emerson is true of other writers in their kind and degree. Thoreau, for example, was a man of far less native intellectual power than Lowell, a smaller man all round; but precisely because he was individualistic and spiritualistic, because, inadequate as his background was, he was a natural response to it, his talent became intense, and that vivid little genius of his, that pungent and confined personality, remains a most positive possession. All American thought of any eminence

(and most of no eminence) has had the nature of a private message; and we have scarcely produced an even second-rate publicist. For deep responds to deep.

Now it is equally plain that Lowell was deficient in the typical traits of effective American thought as that he was naturally endowed with the traits of a social thinker. He had no interest either in his ego or in the cosmos; he was not at home in high latitudes, could not abide Shelley, philologizes over the loftier passages of Spenser, never speaks of Goethe without vaguely insinuating a grudge against him; he was not concerned in pointing morals. On the other hand, he had a gift for satire, a quite genuine scholarship, a definite good taste in literature as such (in distinction from the Emersonian view of literature as a reservoir of examples, morals, phrases, allusions with which to dress out one's own philosophy), a wide experience of men and manners.

These are two altogether distinct sets of qualities: the point is, that while the first set, which Lowell did not possess, arrived in Emerson and Thoreau at a quite eminent fulfilment, the second set, which Lowell did possess, were scarcely fulfilled at all. Emerson and Thoreau achieved their individualistic philosophy, and in that philosophy their individualistic traits were fused and intensified; but Lowell never achieved a social philosophy, and as a result his social traits were scattered and frittered away. His gift for satire was scarcely developed beyond the clever doggerel of the *Fable for Critics*, his wide experience of men and manners served only to make him personally gracious and

attractive, his scholarship instead of serving to unearth and elucidate large conceptions and general ideas served merely to exhibit a thousand unassociated verbal ingenuities, his taste in literature found expression in a series of critical essays every one of which is a *cul-de-sac*, with twinkling lights all along the way, but leading nowhither and ending with itself.

You run through his poems with a quite astounding sense of talent wasted, prettified, conventionalized for the want of animating issues. Give him an adequate issue and you find his whole manner changes. Witness the *Commemoration Ode*, witness *The Biglow Papers*. Slavery and the Mexican war receive in *The Biglow Papers*, it seems to me, just the right measure of literary attention; and this is a felicity which, in the light of his general exuberance, powers of expression, strength and solidity, makes one feel that he could have risen aptly to issues of a more strictly social type had they existed in his background.

The poems of Lowell, in fact, exhibit something which no other body of American poems exhibit, a constant sense of the want of worthy material, a constant suspension of the best faculties. He marks time, rhymes because the rhymes insist upon coming, because of a sheer exuberance which cannot be gainsaid, aware all the while that his words are far more than adequate to anything they actually convey. Of no other American poet is this true: certainly not of Whitman, who, on the contrary, labors for language equal to his idea, nor of Longfellow in his gentle complacency, nor of Whittier, whose narrow but real talent was precisely modu-

lated to the two or three things he had to say, nor of Emerson, whose words are a chime, choice and serene. And Lowell, on the other hand, as constantly seems to be on the point of rising to great issues, to be waiting for them, to be as it were making bids for them. Whenever his heart is fully engaged in his work (which is not often), whenever his emotion is really vented, the quality of his emotion is thoroughly social; its quality is far denser and of wider scope than that of any other American poet save Whitman. What it almost entirely wants is intellectual structure, intellectual contact, ideas. Consider, for example, *The Present Crisis*. The emotional effect of such a passage as that beginning 'For Humanity sweeps onward—' is very nearly a magnificent effect: the emotion of almost any poetry written merely to further a cause (and virtually all American poetry which has any claim to the epithet 'social' has been written to further a cause) is thin and shrill beside it; it *has* density, it *has* scope, it *has* some of the splendor which goes with anything massive that has found a voice. But when you try to discover the intellectual structure of it, the intellectual contact of it, the ideas in it, when you inquire what Humanity is and what it is sweeping onward *to*, you find that Lowell is as vague and flatulent as Tom Paine and Mr. Bryan. No social pressure, no defined issues, no discipline lies behind him. He is simply being magnificently and generously emotional in a social and intellectual vacuum.

Now, Tennyson is not a poet from whom one expects ideas; he is conspicuously, among English poets, one who shunned ideas, shunned issues of

every kind, and would have avoided them altogether if he could. *Locksley Hall*, aside from its curiously antiquated personal sentiment, also contains a picture of the onward sweep of humanity. It has none of the social passion of Lowell's poem, it presents no sort of coherent vision, the ideas in it, like the ideas in *Maud* and *In Memoriam*, once you disentangle them from their poetical glamour, emerge merely as part of the general intellectual bric-à-brac of the Victorian age, owing nothing to the personal experience of Tennyson himself. But the ideas are there; if they are dim and confused it is not because Tennyson was ignorant of them but because he was on the whole not interested in them; he employs them, not for the sake of the ideas, but because he regarded his own poetical function as a representative function and had somehow, if he was to make his particular faith prevail, to make it prevail among these ideas and over them. He was surrounded on all sides by men like Darwin, Mill, Carlyle, Newman, pressed on all sides by conflicting ideas and issues, and with no native inclination for it he was forced into the position of a fighter.

Such is the effect of a social background upon a writer with no native capacity for being a social force. Such is the effect of the want of a social background upon a writer with great native capacity for being a social force. For if the background of Lowell was, in its individual aspect, a spectacle of enterprise and pluck, socially it was arbitrary, undisciplined, windy, bare, and almost infinitely trivial. And there is no doubt that if Lowell had been produced by any European people he would

have been something like a great man. Bred in New England, he was like a born general whose country persists in remaining at peace: such a man skirmishes about in his youth, picks petty quarrels, adopts a commanding attitude, thinks in regiments; and gradually settles down a little fatuously among other military men, talks tactics, tells war stories, reads the reminiscences of dead soldiers, and writes negligible books on armament. In Europe, where the warfare of ideas, of social philosophies, is always an instant close-pressed warfare in which every one is engaged, Lowell would have had the opportunity to bring his artillery into play. In America, where no warfare of ideas has ever existed, where ideas have always been acutely individual and ethical, and where public and social affairs, disjointed, vague, and bare, have always met with the yawning indifference that springs from a relative want of pressure behind, he inevitably became indifferent. His was the indifference of a simple and confirmed man of letters,—that is to say, a poet who has made his peace with the world.

Lowell, in a word, never arrived at a comprehensive attitude toward the inner forces of which books, men, and affairs are symptomatic. Now a point of view in criticism, criticism in the genuine sense, is a working-plan, a definition of issues, which at once renders it impossible to make one's peace with the world, at once and permanently sets one at odds with the world, inevitably makes the critic a champion and a man of war. Generous impulses and enthusiasms, which Lowell had abundantly in his youth, are not enough, unless they are reenforced and in a way solidified into some sort of

personal programme; the sort of programme which, to take instances from among Lowell's contemporaries, Carlyle had in his hero-worship, Ruskin in his central idea of the interaction of harmonious art and harmonious life, Mazzini in his brotherhood of peoples, Taine in his theory of the *milieu*, Nietzsche in his supermorality. To have such a programme is not a limitation; it corresponds on the plane of ideas to style on the plane of letters; it is not merely the mark of intense individuality, not merely the trait which makes men significant and interesting: it is the condition of life in the intellectual and moral world.

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not simply a philosopher but more

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